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# Lifestyles™

## Kids & Technology: What's Best & When

The Best **Photo-Sharing** Sites

**Be Prepared**  
For Anything

Our **Four Favorite**  
CE Devices



March 2006  
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# ceLifestyles™

## feature topic

### Kids & Technology

Your kids are always looking for the latest and greatest in everything, and that includes technology and CE devices. There are laptops, digital cameras, gaming systems, and MP3 players made specifically for children, but do all those devices put your kids in CE overdrive? This month, we give you guidelines on what types of electronics are best for kids and when, and we'll also tell you how you can navigate through the muck to find products that will truly help your children learn and grow.

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#### On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is the Motorola PEBL (\$299.99 with T-Mobile service plan; [www.motorola.com](http://www.motorola.com)).



# Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *CE Lifestyles*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

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# Digital Studio

Digital cameras and camcorders are changing the way we record the moments of our lives, from quick snapshots of favorite vacation spots to priceless video clips of first steps and other important milestones. Get to know your new digicam or camcorder and learn what to do with your photos and video once you have them.

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## CE @Home

The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?

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Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. Also, read what real women just like you are saying about how consumer electronics are affecting their everyday lives.

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## Editor's Note

For most of the nation, March is one big flirtation of a month. We'll get a glimmer of springtime hope with a day of 50 degree weather; but then March, the little coquette she is, will pull the rug out from underneath us with one of those late-winter blizzards that leave us feeling hopeless that we'll ever again be warm.

What to do with those desperate feelings? Go someplace warm! I'm writing this month's note from CES (the Consumer Electronics Show) in Las Vegas during the beginning of January. It's a lovely 70 degrees and has been for days. I'm not wearing a jacket, and during the day I can wear flip-flops. What a wonderful way to get away from the winter gray of Nebraska.

But I haven't left everything at home—far from it. I'm writing on my laptop; I'm listening to Outkast on my MP3 player; and I've got my Treo 650 smart phone so I can snap photos of the beautiful new Wynn casino and email them to my friends and family.

Sure, I could pack light and leave everything unnecessary at home. But the feeling of isolation and disconnectedness that is so easy to get when you're on the road is not fun at all compared to getting the latest photos of my niece via email or being able to boogie down to "Hey Ya" in my hotel room. To me, my laptop, MP3 player, and other CE devices are as necessary as the sunscreen on my shoulders.

Traveling can be a total break from home; but I like to think of it as a way that I can isolate and focus on the best things in my life and let all the other everyday annoyances fall by the wayside. Technology helps me do that by letting me stay connected to what I value most. What better way to spend a week in Las Vegas?

Live well, friends.

Katie Sommer  
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**Hours**  
Mon. - Fri.: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. (CST)  
Sat.: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (CST)  
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A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned shirt, is smiling and looking down at a small, silver electronic device she is holding in her hands. The background is a blurred indoor setting with large windows.

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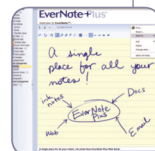
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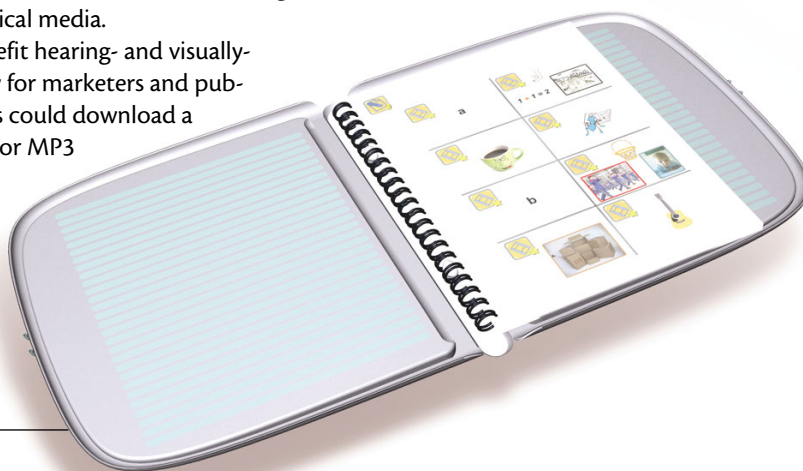
# ce news

COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## TUI Gives Readers One-Touch Access To Podcasts

► Somatic Digital ([www.somaticdigital.com](http://www.somaticdigital.com)), a developer of Touch User Interface technology, has announced that publishers can now link podcasts to the printed page because of enhancements to its BookDesigner software. Through sensors embedded in books and catalogs, TUI lets readers retrieve digital content stored on hard drives, the Internet, or optical media.

Not only do products that incorporate TUI benefit hearing- and visually-impaired students, but they also offer another way for marketers and publishers to reach customers. For instance, customers could download a publisher's or retailer's podcast to their computer or MP3 player through the use of Bluetooth technology and then listen to it at their convenience—all initiated through the touch of a paper icon. Jason Barkeloo, president of Somatic, says he envisions many uses for this technology, such as in cook-books and repair manuals.



## MICROSOFT PACKAGING Gets Eco-Friendly

► The world's biggest software maker is helping the environment in a big way. Microsoft has phased out the use of PVC (polyvinyl chloride) packaging for its products in favor of PET (polyethylene terephthalate), a chlorine-free plastic commonly found in recyclable bottles, jars, and milk cartons. As of Jan. 1, at least 25% of the PET content Microsoft is using in its packaging is recycled.





## First HD Radio Receptor Debuts

With all the attention satellite radio has been getting, it's easy to overlook HD radio. Now that the first HD radio receptor has hit the market, though, that may change.

The Boston Acoustics Receptor Radio HD (\$499; [www.bostonacoustics.com](http://www.bostonacoustics.com)) employs HD technology from iBiquity Digital. This tabletop model lets you tune in to high-definition radio broadcasts and multicasting, where available. The compact, platinum-colored system comes with two speakers, an input for MP3 players and other devices, 20 AM/FM presets, and a sleek remote control.

Hundreds of AM and FM stations across the United States broadcast in high definition. To find an HD station in your area, click the map at [www.ibiquity.com/hdradio/hdradio\\_hdstations.htm](http://www.ibiquity.com/hdradio/hdradio_hdstations.htm).

Yamaha, Radiosophy, and Polk Audio are expected to release their own HD tabletop radios this year, according to the iBiquity Web site.

## All-Digital TV Broadcasts Will Be Law In 2009

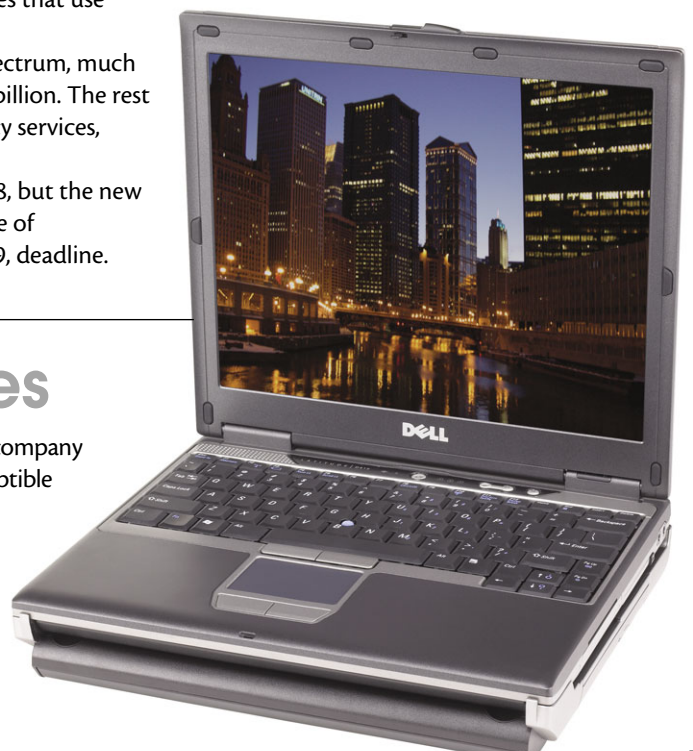
Analog TV broadcasts will be history come Feb. 17, 2009. That's the new deadline set by the U.S. Senate for TV stations to complete the transition from analog to digital broadcasts. The bill also provides \$1.5 billion in converter box vouchers to assist the 21 million U.S. homes that use neither cable nor satellite TV.

Switching to all-digital broadcasts will free parts of the radio spectrum, much of which will be auctioned off by the government for at least \$10 billion. The rest will be allocated for improving communications among emergency services, such as fire departments.

The original transition date Congress set was for the end of 2008, but the new deadline is the result of a compromise reached between the House of Representatives and the Senate, which had backed an April 7, 2009, deadline.

## Dell Recalls Laptop Batteries

Dell is recalling batteries installed in about 22,000 notebooks the company sold from October 2004 to October 2005, saying that they are susceptible to overheating and posing a fire risk. If you bought a Dell notebook during that time, Dell encourages you to call (866) 342-0011 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. CST or log on to [www.dellbatteryprogram.com](http://www.dellbatteryprogram.com). At press time Dell says it had received three reports of batteries overheating and damaging furniture and other personal property; there have been no reported injuries to date.





## Higher Ringtone Prices Don't Deter Consumers

A 2005 survey by The NPD Group ([www.npdgroup.com](http://www.npdgroup.com)) shows that consumers are willing to pay more for a portion of a song used as a ringtone for their cell phone than to download the entire song for their MP3 player. The current average price of a ringtone is \$2.50 compared to 99 cents for an entire song. NPD's research showed that the optimal price for consumers who already bought ringtones is \$3.25 for each new tone.

## Printer Owners Wary Of Third-Party Ink Jet Cartridges

Lyra Research has found that U.S. consumers have many reasons for not buying third-party, or aftermarket, ink jet cartridges. The single greatest reason is that they don't trust the quality of these cartridges. Other reasons include compatibility issues and negligible price differences:

### Reasons For Not Buying Third-Party Cartridges

I don't trust aftermarket ink jet cartridges	23%
I want only the best print quality	21%
I cannot find an aftermarket cartridge that is compatible	12%
The difference in price is not enough to make me switch	10%
I am worried about damaging my printer	8%
My preferred store does not carry aftermarket cartridges	7%
Other	7%
Selecting an aftermarket cartridges is too confusing	6%
Don't know	6%

Source: Lyra Research

## Online Stores Reel In Shoppers With Free Shipping

According to BizRate Research, free shipping with conditions ranked as the most successful online retailing promotion during the 2005 holiday shopping season, with 62% of retailers citing that as their most successful sales promotional.

In addition to money-saving promotions, shoppers gave other reasons for buying online:

### Reasons For Holiday Online Shopping

Avoiding crowds	73.4%
Convenience	66.6%
Avoiding lines	59.0%
Ease of finding items	51.6%
Price comparisons	51.1%
Product comparisons	44.5%



Visa USA's SpendTrak report says that consumers spent more than \$500 million online on Cyber Monday (the first Monday after Thanksgiving) alone using Visa cards, a 26% increase from the same day in 2004.

Source: [www.shop.org](http://www.shop.org) and [www.usa.visa.com](http://www.usa.visa.com)

## tidbits

About **25 million Americans** have sold something online.

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project

**4 million U.S. tweens** will be using their own **cell phones** by 2009.

Source: iGillottResearch

**83%** of U.S. and Canadian youths and young adults (ages 12 to 21) **use instant messaging**, compared to 32% of online adults.

Source: Forrester Research

**Bob Dylan** will host a weekly music show on XM Satellite Radio channel 40 beginning in March.

Source: XM Satellite Radio

47 million U.S. households will **pay bills** online by 2010, a **75% increase** from the end of 2004.

Source: Forrester Research

Worldwide **shipments of PCs** will grow by 10.5% this year, thanks to an increased demand for portable units.

Source: IDC





## Every Theater Needs A Stage.

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Apple's iPod nano was one of last year's most popular products. Spruce up your nano (or other iPod models) with some of these simple yet useful accessories.



### Oregon Scientific iBall

\$249 • [www.oregonscientific.com](http://www.oregonscientific.com)

The iBall rolls into town with a wireless speaker, a charging dock, and an iTunes sync cable. Drop your nano in the dock, sync with your computer, and transmit the player's contents to the cute round speaker from up to 100 feet away.



### Trendy Geek Trendy Shield

\$12.99 for three • [www.trendygeek.com](http://www.trendygeek.com)

Users' biggest complaints about the nano are about the tendency of the screens to scratch. Clear plastic shields from Trendy Geek protect your iPod from scratches while preserving the Click Wheel functions and showing off the player's design and natural finish.



## Etymotic Research ER6 Isolator earphones

\$139 • [www.etymotic.com](http://www.etymotic.com)

Specifically designed to match the new optional black finish introduced with the nano (and now on the video iPod), Etymotic's in-ear headphones are top-of-the-line for sound quality and isolation. Forget gym noise or crying babies on an airplane; get lost in your own soundtrack.



## CyraKnow Rambler Audio Phrase Books

\$12.95 each;  
\$34.95 for four-language pack •  
[www.cyraknow-audio.com](http://www.cyraknow-audio.com)

Get ready for vacation with CyraKnow's language phrase books created specifically for iPods. Choose from Spanish, French, Italian, and German—or get all four. Look up words or phrases on the nano's screen and then listen to pronunciation guides and other information. "Bien sûr, je parle français. Pourquoi demandez-vous?"



## Logitech Wireless Music System For iPod

\$149.99 • [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

Wirelessly stream your nano's contents to any home stereo or set of speakers from up to 33 feet away. Logitech's system pairs a transmitter plugged into your iPod's headphone port with a receiver plugged into an input jack on a stereo system, receiver, or standalone speakers.





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# outfit your life

## Accessories With Style

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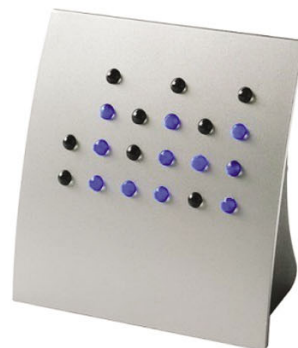
**Cevese iPod Case**  
\$35 • [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org)

Italian designer Luisa Cevese decided to make use of the material normally wasted during textile production. This tote captures colorful scraps of fabric, collected from factory floors around the world, between translucent layers of vinyl. Durable, eye-catching and unique, the Cevese iPod case is available through the Museum of Modern Art gift store, and museum members pay only \$31.50.



**Bennie And Olive Pulp Fiction iPod Cases**  
\$69 • [store.virginthreads.com/bennieandolive.html](http://store.virginthreads.com/bennieandolive.html)

Any fan of the early 20th-century American dime novel knows that a hollowed-out book makes a great place to keep your gat, vial of poison, secret room key, or emergency cash. Now you can keep your iPod there, too. These cases are designed to look like old-school pulp fiction titles, while featuring hard covers to protect the goods inside. Fits older 20GB or 40GB players, see, and we don't mean maybe. Select from such thrilling titles as *The Ace of Spades*, *Scavengers in Space*, or our personal favorite, *Hotel Fever*.



**Powers Of 2 BCD Clock**  
\$29.99 • [www.anelace.com](http://www.anelace.com)

If you looked at this product graphic before reading this text, and you said to yourself, "Hey, cute! That clock tells time in binary code," well, at least two things may be true: You need to get out of the office more often, and Target.com is stocking the Powers of 2 BCD clock with you in mind. We're not sure how it handles daylight savings time, but instructions are included.

**surfACE Laptop Support System**  
\$144 (clear), \$149 (translucent) • [www.edge blur.com](http://www.edgeblur.com)

Form follows function and vice versa with this portable laptop table from edgeBLUR.

You can configure your surfACE for bed, tabletop, easy chair, or anywhere else work happens. Ergonomic engineering supports human and machine together; design elements, such as the perforated worktop, create a modern look while affording practical heat distribution. Optional attachments, such as a tripod mount for creating instant workspaces on the road, are available and/or in development at edgeBLUR.







**NEW**  
**AVG Anti-Virus**  
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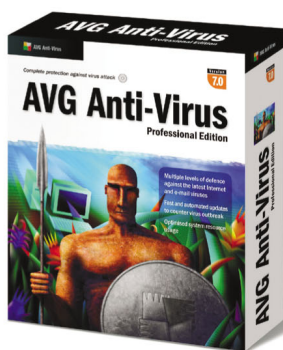
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easy on users.**



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Shopping Site Of The Month

# Jewels For Me

[www.jewelsforme.com](http://www.jewelsforme.com)

D

iamonds are a girl's best friend. Right? Well, although we love diamonds as much as the next girl, we like other stones, too. In fact, we like anything that sparkles. The jewelry you wear says a lot about you. It might proclaim your attachment to another or give a hint of your birth month. Or, it may just say, "Look at me. I am fabulous." Although we don't know how or why, wearing beautiful jewelry just makes us smile a little bit wider.

Even though it's safe to say that most women love jewelry, each one probably likes something different. So why settle for a piece that's mass produced when you can have a hand in designing your own masterpiece? At Jewels For Me ([www.jewelsforme.com](http://www.jewelsforme.com)), that's exactly what you can do. And what makes it even better is you don't have to go to the mall to do it. In fact, you don't have to leave home.

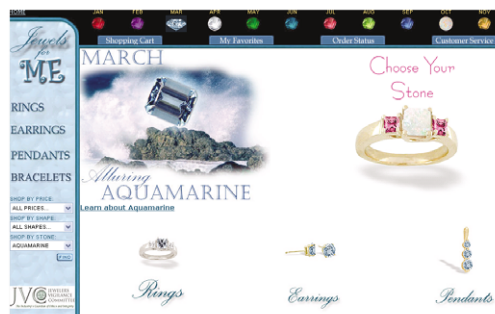
## Lose Your Mind

We love shopping online, and most of the time, we're able to keep our composure while making our selections. But when we started exploring Jewels For Me, we quickly realized that a girl could lose her mind with all the choices this site offers. And that's a good thing.

Unlike other jewelry design sites we've visited, Jewelry For Me lets you design not only rings, but also earrings, pendants, and bracelets. When you enter the Jewels For Me site, you'll see the

birthstone of the current month featured, so during March, you'll see a large blue gemstone and the heading Alluring Aquamarine. Along the top of the site is a list of the months, along with a jewel representing that month's birthstone. Click the stone to see that month's page and view jewelry featuring that stone. You can also click a link to learn more about the birthstone you've chosen.


If you'd prefer to search by item, use the links along the left side of the page. You can click a link to begin designing Rings, Earrings, Pendants, and Bracelets, or you can use drop-down menus to narrow your search by price, shape (cut of the stone), or stone.



## Let The Fun Begin

To try your hand at designing, click the link of your choice. In order to see the greatest number of possibilities, we clicked Rings and then Design Your Own. From this page you can choose to view your choices in yellow or white gold by clicking the corresponding link or change your choice of jewelry (to earrings, pendants, or bracelets) at any time. We decided to shop for a ring in white gold.

We found a style we liked (a simple design with three 3mm round stones) and clicked the picture. Next we played with various combinations of stones, using a series of drop-down menus under the Design Your Own Ring heading. We opted for a patriotic look and selected Genuine Ruby, Genuine White Topaz, and Genuine Sapphire from the menus. If you like what you see, select your size from the drop-down menu and click Add To Cart to begin the ordering process.

With the selection of styles and stones, you're almost guaranteed to find something you like. Which, depending on how you look at it, can be a very good thing or perhaps a little dangerous. Either way, you're sure to have fun dreaming of the possibilities. 

BY JOY MARTIN

# COMPLETE THE DREAM...HOME



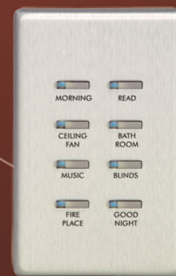
Envision a home that automatically anticipates all of your needs. Just before going to bed, you roll over and touch the "Good Night" button, which turns on the motion activated outdoor lights, arms the security system, locks the doors and gently fades off all the lights in the house. Sitting in your home theater, you lightly press the button labeled "Movie" and the shades are drawn, the lights are dimmed, the projection system turns on along with the surround-sound system, and the movie starts. A Vantage system manages all of today's technology and provides complete control to every system in your house, putting the finishing touches on your dream home.



## V A N T A G E

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*Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.*

# His . . .

After taking my share of history courses in college, I developed a keen affinity for the various revolutions littered throughout the centuries. Each one has its share of George Washingtons and Benedict Arnolds; the stories of these heroes and villains rivals the tales any storyteller could spin. What I find most invigorating about revolutions is the fundamental shift in ideals a society can experience after a revolution. Competing philosophies collide; a new philosophy emerges; and people march along to the beat of this drum.

So what does Slingmedia's Slingbox (\$249.99; [www.slingmedia.com](http://www.slingmedia.com)) have to do with July 14, 1789 (bonus points if you can name that date)? In principle, the Slingbox could be the start of a revolutionary movement for avid TV watchers. As much as I'd like to tell you to rush out and scoop one up, I don't think the Slingbox is quite ready for prime time.

Just as a TiVo or DVR lets you watch your shows any time you want, the Slingbox allows you to watch your shows *anywhere* you want. I'll admit that this ability didn't seem as appealing as DVR's capabilities, but then I considered the possibilities.


Imagine this scenario: You're called away on a business trip the same week of your daughter's state soccer tournament. With the Slingbox, you can watch the game highlights on your local news from almost anywhere in the country. Personally, the thrill of watching a Cubs game on WGN (this station broadcasts several games but doesn't reach a lot of markets) while basking in the California sun is a luxury I don't take lightly.

Slingmedia apparently had the presence of mind to understand that I'd rather avoid continuing to pour money into accessories after purchasing them. Unlike services such as TiVo or Xbox Live, there are no monthly charges to use the Slingbox, and my wallet certainly appreciates that.

Using broadband Internet access to sling your TV programs across the globe is a logical delivery method, but I think it's one of the Slingbox's primary weaknesses. If you're still

clinging to dial-up Internet access and want to enjoy its remote viewing capabilities, the Slingbox will be little more than a funky-looking hunk of plastic. Likewise, it's equally worthless if you don't have a PC with broadband on the receiving end.

And although my feminine foil who graces the right page rarely sees eye to eye with me on most issues, we agree that the Slingbox's setup isn't quite as simple to set up as the box seems to indicate. I'll concede that configuring the Slingbox itself isn't too difficult, but coaxing it to agree with my NETGEAR wireless router was a chore. It's definitely not a task for beginners.

The Slingbox is one of the more innovative products I've seen in a while. Even though it's a little ahead of its time, I wouldn't be surprised if we were all slinging in the near future. 

by Vince Cogley



# & Hers CE


If you're addicted to your local cable TV programs, spend a great deal of time away from home, and have a laptop with a high-speed Internet connection, then you'll love Sling Media's Slingbox (\$249; [www.slingmedia.com](http://www.slingmedia.com)). I, however, am not obsessed with programs on my local cable channels and don't spend a lot of time out of town. OK, so I do compulsively plan my evenings around certain TV programs (even, on one occasion, making my husband wait for dinner until "Lost" was over), but these shows are on in the evening and recordable with a plain ol' VCR or DVR.

Even if you plan your life around certain TV shows and don't mind recording the ones you miss, the Slingbox is still a cool device because it does something your DVR can't: It lets you watch television *anywhere* you want. So, for example, my sister in Chicago doesn't have cable TV; however, she does have a computer with a broadband Internet connection. With the Slingbox software downloaded on her PC and the Slingbox hooked up to my cable TV at home, I can watch any cable TV shows on her computer when I go to visit her.

Watching an HBO movie on my sister's computer is the easy part, but actually setting up the Slingbox to make this possible is surprisingly difficult. The Slingbox looks like a simple, user-friendly device, but looks can be deceiving. First off, it's easier to watch if you have a high-speed Internet connection (because if you have dial-up, you might have difficulty even watching the video) and a UPnP (Universal Plug and Play) router. Frankly, without these two things, the Slingbox might as well be a silver, plastic candy bar-like ornament sitting on top of your TV. (And who needs a huge, fake candy bar reminding her that she needs to follow through with her New Year's resolution to go to the gym?)

The high-speed Internet connection is an important part of the Slingbox's setup because the faster your connection speed, the better the image quality of shows you stream. On my broadband connection, streamed images looked pretty good; slightly better than downloaded videos you can watch on Web sites. Also, I had to adjust my computer monitor's display resolution down in order to avoid blurry-looking images because the standard TV resolution (about 640 x 480 pixels) wasn't well-matched to my monitor's higher resolution (1,024 x 768).

As for connecting my router, this was the most difficult part of setting up the Slingbox. If you don't have a UPnP router (I didn't), setup is time-consuming. UPnP routers make it easier for external devices to connect to a network, so without a UPnP router, I had to manually set up the router to send information from the Slingbox to my computer.

Besides the challenges I came across while I was setting up the Slingbox, I've grown fond of the idea of having my TV shows anywhere—even in my kitchen while I'm cooking dinner. 

by Trista Kunce

Sling Media's Slingbox

\$249

[www.slingmedia.com](http://www.slingmedia.com)





# Fab Four

In this new column, we get a chance to rave about some of the best CE products that pass through our labs, across our desks, and into our lives. In each issue we'll select four gadgets—one digital camera, one MP3 player, one cell phone, and one “wild card”—and tell you why we think they're all truly fabulous.

Some of them will be newly released, cutting-edge products that have impressed us with the way they push the envelope; others will be dependable mainstays that have discovered a recipe for success and had the good sense not to mess with it; and every now and then, we'll show you something truly unusual, a new technology, a new use for an old technology, or a unique combination of both. This issue, we introduce you to a groundbreaking camera, an MP3 player that defies the notion that jacks-of-all-trades are masters of none, a phone you can freeze, and a set of earphones that truly are sublime.

## digital camera



## digital camera

**Why:** This sharp-looking camera, in either silver or black, gets props for being the first digital camera to offer a 16:9 (true widescreen) aspect ratio. Combined with the 8.4MP resolution, point-and-shoot photographers can create striking panoramic images and film-quality prints up to 18 x 24 inches. The DMC-LX1 records movies at 30fps (frames per second)—and you can watch those movies as full-screen images on your widescreen TV.

Small and lightweight, it satisfies true shutterbugs with its high-quality 4X Leica optical zoom lens (28 to 112mm wide-angle capability). The Extended Optical Zoom feature minimizes the image degradation that typically occurs when zooming.

The DMC LX1 features a 2.5-inch high-resolution LCD with a clear display and a Power LCD button, which boosts backlighting by about 40%, a help when shooting on sunny days.

**Bottom Line:** Professional-quality prints from an attractive, point-and-shoot camera.

## mp3 player



## mp3 player

**Why:** Creative's new 30GB Zen Vision:M proves you *can* take it with you. This large capacity micro drive plays MP3s and video, stores photos, tunes in to FM radio, functions as a PIM (personal information manager), and has a voice recorder. Creative estimates the drive holds 15,000 songs, 120 hours of video, or tens of thousands of pictures. The rechargeable Li-Ion battery gives you 14 hours of audio and four hours of video playtime. It comes in five colors (black, white, light blue, green, and pink) and features a 2.5-inch HD color screen. The PIM component lets you store and view daily tasks, contact lists, and a calendar. It syncs with Microsoft Outlook; edit your info using Creative Media Explorer software.

With PlaysForSure support, Creative promises you can play any digital music you buy, including files you download from Napster, Yahoo! Music Unlimited, and Rhapsody. It also supports TiVoToGo.

**Bottom Line:** A new, multifaceted heavy-hitter in the micro drive market.

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

## phone



Nextel i355

\$239.99 • www.sprint.com

phone

**Why:** One of the most rugged phones on the market, the Nextel i355 bundles a GPS, cell phone, and walkie-talkie in a sturdy, water-resistant package. Essentially an upgrade of the well-respected i315, the i355 introduces several noted improvements. It now features a color screen, a better keyboard, and a new version of TeleNav GPS software, and it supports Nextel's new Group Connect and Java-based mobile email features.

Nextel designed this phone with wilderness adventurers (and those who work outdoors) in mind. Like the i315, the i355 is built to take a beating. Although not completely submersible, you can carry it in the rain with no fear; you can leave it in the car, the tent, or at a job site, even if the temperature drops below freezing; you can even throw it on the pavement without much concern.

**Bottom Line:** This rugged, full-featured phone can take whatever you dish out.

## wild card



Shure E-series earphones

\$99 to \$499 • www.shure.com

wild card

**Why:** If you care enough about music to spend \$400 on an iPod (60GB \$399; www.ipod.com), why dilute the experience with mediocre headphones? The Shure E-series of sound-isolating earphones is the Mercedes-Benz of earphones—only you won't need a second mortgage to buy them. The E series ranges from the E2c (\$99) to the E5c (\$499).

Sound-isolating earphones provide such excellent sound quality in part because of their pedigree. They were developed so musicians could hear their own performances onstage. (Elvis Presley was among the artists who used a much earlier version of Shure earphones.)

The E-series uses soft, earplug-like sleeves to fit snugly in your ear. In addition to great music, there's a long-term health benefit. Because sound isolation brings you fuller sound at a lower volume, you won't have to blast your eardrums to tune out sounds on the street.

**Bottom Line:** Comfortable, durable, professional-quality music to your ears.

The Camera:  
**Panasonic  
Lumix DMC LX1**  
**\$599.95**  
www.panasonic.com

The MP3 Player:  
**Creative Zen  
Vision:M**  
**\$329.99**  
www.creative.com

The Phone  
**Nextel i355**  
**\$239.99**  
www.sprint.com

The Wild Card:  
**Shure E-series  
earphones**  
**\$99 to  
\$499**  
www.shure.com



# Best Budget MP3 Players

## Grab One & Hit The Road

**T**hanks to hard drive-based MP3 players, you can toss the CD rack and carry your entire music collection—if you're willing to put a \$300 to \$400 device in your pocket, that is. Although these players have large displays and phenomenal storage capacities, some audiophiles are turning to smaller devices

that carry fewer songs and smaller price tags.

Many of these players use flash memory instead of hard drives. Unlike hard drives, which have multiple components, flash memory has no moving parts. These players won't skip when jostled, which means you can drive or jog without interrupting your tunes. They're also light: Many flash-based MP3 players are lighter than (and some are smaller than) your mobile phone.

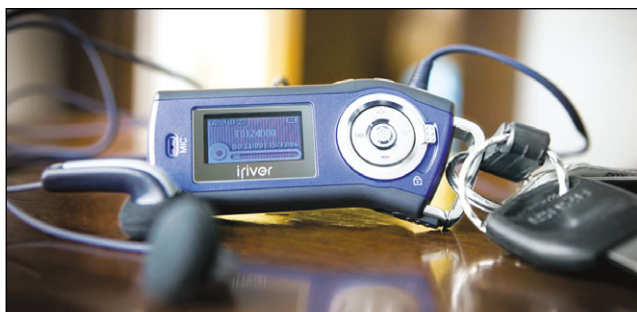
### Shop Smart

You'll miss out on some important features (and you might even acquire a few that you don't want) if you focus solely on capacity and a player's bling factor. Some players, for example, include an FM radio. If you're a jogger, this is an important feature: You can check weather reports when you're out on the trail. Audiophiles will want to keep an eye out for players that have adjustable EQ settings and decent volume. Some players can drown out

## iriver T10 1GB

\$199.99

[www.iriveramerica.com](http://www.iriveramerica.com)



Gone are the days of special software that shuffled music from your computer to the iriver. Windows Media Player recognizes the T10 as soon as you plug the included USB cable into your PC, which means you can use WMP's slick Sync feature to pick out and transfer songs.

Speaking of USB, a sturdy rubber cap plugs the USB port and protects it from dust when you take the player for a run. Other jogger-friendly features include a breathable armband and a button lock that prevents the player from skipping songs when you drop it in your pocket. Unlike most player armbands, the T10's strap includes a special case that faces the player toward you when you lift your arm.

**Storage capacity:** 1GB

**Size:** 3.4 x 1.6 x 1.2 inches\*

**Battery life:** 45 hours

**Audio file support:** MP3, OGG, WMA

**Cool features:** FM radio, button lock, color display

**Summary:** A sporty, tough little player

\*HxWxD

The sporty player also has an FM tuner. A Record feature lets you tape radio and store it on the player. The T10 supports MP3, OGG (Ogg Vorbis), and WMA digital music formats and has several EQ presets. Users can also adjust the EQ settings manually via the Settings menu and then choose the User EQ preset to enjoy the custom EQ. And thanks to color screen, you can view pictures (in the BMP file format) while you listen.

The T10 offers great sound quality and plenty of volume. You won't have any trouble shutting out the rest of the world when you plug in the comfortable earbuds. To top things off, the T10 uses a single AA battery to provide about 45 hours of playtime.

the sounds of the highway, while others simply lack audio oomph.

Accessories can also make or break a player purchase. If you stick to better-known brands, you'll find more third-party accessories that fit your lifestyle. Once you've found the perfect device, check local or online stores for armbands, belt clips, or equipment that will let you play songs over your car's speakers. Many players include only a lanyard.

Users who plan to take the player on long trips will want to make sure it uses an appropriate battery. Players that have a built-in, rechargeable battery won't make great travel partners for people traveling to other countries. (You'd need to lug around outlet adapters for other regions.) Many small players use easy-to-find batteries, such as AA batteries.

You'll also want to make sure your player is compatible with your music


service. Apple's iTunes service, which lets users buy individual songs for 99 cents, supports only Apple's iPod line, including the iPod nano and shuffle (and PCs). The service uses copy protection to prevent the tunes from playing on third-party players.

Many new players (including Creative's Zen Micro, iriver's 1GB T10, and Samsung's YP-F1) have Microsoft's PlaysForSure logo, which helps audio enthusiasts match players to music services. If you're not an Apple fan, visit the PlaysForSure program's site ([www.playsforsure.com](http://www.playsforsure.com)) and then click Find Devices at the top of the screen. The site lists dozens of devices and lets you search by price. Finding a music service is just as easy: The site lists several types of services, including online stores that sell individual songs and services that offer subscriptions. PlaysForSure encompasses well-known services, such as MusicMatch and

Napster, as well as more obscure stores, such as PassAlong.

Of course, Web sites and online retailers don't let you try out players before you buy, so we did the footwork for you. We rounded up four of the best players on the market with price tags under \$200.

## Music To Your Ears

Sure, there are plenty of portable music devices out there that can also display pictures or even movies, but what these players lack in outrageous toys they make up for with sensible features you'll use day in and day out. All of these players are easy to use and store at least 1GB of song files, which is plenty of music for day-to-day listening. And all of them support MP3, which is one of the most common audio types. 

BY JOSHUA GULICK

## Creative Zen Micro

\$199.99

[www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)



Flash memory-based players make great jogging and workout companions, but they can't store massive music collections (yet). If you're searching for a player that will get you through a long trip, check out Creative's Zen Micro. The hard drive-based Micro is available in 4GB, 5GB, and 6GB sizes and a range of colors, including blue, green, orange, and red.

The Micro's sleek body rivals Apple's standard-setting iPod in the style department. A thin, lit border surrounds a spacious screen and a well-designed touchpad that lets users quickly browse music, adjust the volume, or change settings. Should you tire of your mere 5GB music collection, you can turn to the built-in FM radio for some fresh tunes. The radio features 32 customizable presets.

**Storage capacity:** 5GB

**Size:** 3.3 x 2 x 0.7 inches\*

**Battery life:** 12 hours

**Audio file support:** MP3, WAV, WMA

**Cool features:** Enormous storage capacity, tons of radio presets

**Summary:** A slick, inexpensive, hard drive-based player.

\*HxWxD

In Removable Disk Mode, the drive cordons off between 128MB and 2GB of storage space that appears as an empty drive in your PC's My Computer window. You can drag and drop data files into this area and then unload them onto any other computer.

The Micro is larger than its flash-based counterparts (it's about the size of a deck of cards), but the extra capacity and the removable, rechargeable battery make up for its bulk. Creative tosses earphones, software, a USB cord, and a bag for the player into the box.



## Samsung YP-F1

One of Samsung's smallest digital music players, the YP-F1 won't attract attention when you take it on the road. However, it will catch your attention as soon as you power it on. The player offers crisp sounds and has plenty of volume, and it stores up to 1GB of your favorite tunes. Samsung offers 256MB (\$99), 512MB (\$129), and 1GB (\$179) models of the portable player.

Despite the YP-F1's tiny screen, it displays plenty of information about your music. The middle line displays the song's name (it scrolls to accommodate song titles that are longer than the width of the screen), as well as the file type. The display also offers information about remaining battery power and elapsed song time. Navigating the player's menus is a little tricky at first, but once we got the hang of it, we were able to flip between digital music and the FM tuner without any trouble. The player can record FM radio and has a customizable EQ, as well as EQ presets. You can also enable the Bass Booster feature when you listen to songs in Classic, Jazz, Rock, and Normal EQ settings. The WOW menu lets you further adjust sound settings.

As with iriver's T10, the YP-F1 supports Windows Media Player's syncing options. Simply install the player's drivers, add songs to Media Player's Sync playlist, and then click the Sync button. The YP-F1 has a built-in belt clip and also includes a lanyard and a custom USB cable.

\$179

[www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)



**Storage capacity:** 1GB

**Size:** 2.5 x 1.14 x 0.6 inches\*

**Battery life:** 10 hours

**Audio file support:** OGG, MP3, WAV, WMA

**Cool features:** Built-in belt clip and easy syncing

**Summary:** It isn't flashy, but it has plenty of features

\*HxWxD

## Sony Walkman Core NW-E507

With the NW-E507, Sony solves the dilemma we've all faced at one time or another: You grab your player and head toward the door, only to discover that the battery is dead and that you'll need to charge it for hours. This device has Sony's Super Quick Battery Charge, which lets it play for as long as three hours on a mere three-minute charge. If you can't afford even three minutes, you probably need an organizer more than an MP3 player, anyway.

The slim, iPod shuffle-like player has two important features that the shuffle lacks: an easy-to-use FM radio and a display. The tiny display tracks song names and battery power and lets users navigate albums and titles. Unlike most players, which have easy-to-spot screens, you won't see the display until you turn on the player. The device sports play and volume buttons, as well as a ring that twists to advance tracks.

You can't sync WMA files to the NW-E507 via Windows Media Player. If your digital music collection is in MP3 or Sony's ATRAC3 format, you won't have any trouble syncing them via the included SonicStage software. The program transfers only unprotected WMA files, which means the player can't receive many WMA tunes. The NW-E507 package includes a belt clip and a coupon for five downloads from the Connect online music service.

\$159.95

[www.sonymystyle.com](http://www.sonymystyle.com)



**Storage capacity:** 1GB

**Size:** 3.33 x 1.13 x 0.54 inches\*

**Battery life:** 50 hours

**Audio file support:** ATRAC3, ATRAC3-plus, MP3, and WAV and unprotected WMA when converted to ATRAC format

**Cool features:** Super-fast charging

**Summary:** Small, flashy player

\*HxWxD

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# All Jacked Up

## Untangle The Mess Of Inputs Behind Your A/V Equipment

**A**s you watch the professional installer wall-mount your beautiful new flat-panel LCD TV, you're amazed by how simple the process seems. Imbued with a sense of rugged individualism, you decide to get your hands dirty and set up an HTB (home theater in a box) without outside assistance.

Suddenly, what had seemed like a simple weekend DIY project has become a ghastly nightmare of cords and jacks that leave you scratching your head in frustration. What does a digital audio cable look like, and how is it different

from an analog audio cable? Why are there a plethora of video inputs, and is it really worth splurging on a premium video cable? We'll help you untangle composite from component and other types of A/V cables and put names to jacks and inputs you are likely to encounter.

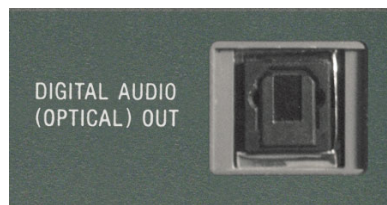
### The Cast Of Characters

Analog and digital audio are the two major types of cables. Analog audio is a far more affordable option (especially stereo audio), but if your A/V equipment supports digital audio, it's the road to pure aural bliss.

You should find at least one of each of the following inputs on your brand new TV: composite, S-Video, and component. If you have HDTV and use a converter box, you will need to run component cables from the box to your TV to properly view high-definition programming. In contrast, composite video is the least expensive way to watch standard TV and your VHS tapes and DVDs.

HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) is in a class by itself because it supports uncompressed HD video and 8-channel HD audio signals, all piped through a single cable.

### DIGITAL AUDIO



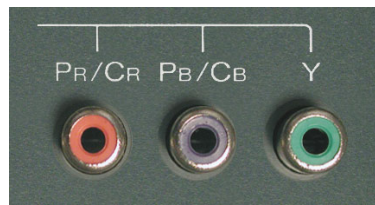
#### WHAT IT DOES

Maintains a pure digital signal from an audio source to a receiver for the best possible audio quality.

#### WHAT IT REALLY MEANS

A digital audio connection requires only one cable and requires no digital-to-analog conversion. A single digital audio cable is capable of carrying every discrete channel. A coaxial digital audio jack uses a cable that looks like a stereo audio cable. An optical digital audio jack has its own unique look, and optical cables don't suffer from EM (electromagnetic) and RF (radio frequency) interference.

### COMPONENT VIDEO



#### WHAT IT DOES

Further divides the video signal to provide the best possible analog video connection.

#### WHAT IT REALLY MEANS

Somewhere on your TV, you should see three component jacks labeled Y, Pb, and Pr (possibly Y, Cb, and Cr). Essentially, this means each corresponding cable delivers a separate color (red, green, and blue) to a video device. This method makes component video superior to composite and S-Video and dramatically improves color purity and detail while reducing **color noise** (a disturbance that interferes with the signal transmission and reduces its quality).

**S-VIDEO****WHAT IT DOES**

Improves picture quality by separating parts of video signal.

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS**

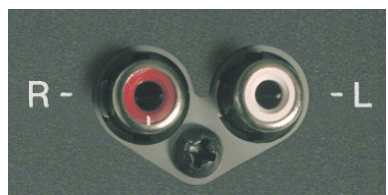
Although it still uses a single cable, S-Video divides a signal into chrominance (color information) and luminance (brightness). By separating these values, an S-Video cable and jack prevent color bleeding in an image. The result is a picture that is clearer and sharper than a composite-video image.

**HDMI****WHAT IT DOES**

Digitally sends both audio and video to appropriate devices.

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS**

HDMI is at the forefront of consumer electronics technology. Because it is an all-digital interface, you won't lose any video or audio quality from a digital source. These cables are perfect for HDTV because they can carry a high-definition program's digital picture and surround sound. The downside is that these cables are expensive.

**STEREO AUDIO****WHAT IT DOES**

Delivers 2-channel audio from a source such as a VCR, CD player, or DVD player.

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS**

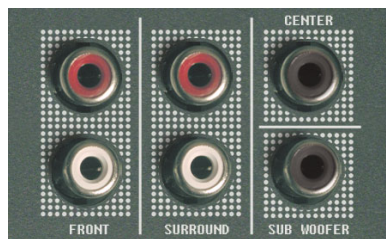
Stereo audio (also called composite audio) has two discrete channels, meaning a left and right speaker produce different sounds. Because stereo audio is analog, digital audio content such as a DVD's sound goes through a digital-to-analog conversion, and you lose quality in the transition.

**COMPOSITE VIDEO****WHAT IT DOES**

Sends a video signal from a video source to a display or projector using a jack that looks like a composite audio jack.

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS**


You can identify composite video cables by their yellow ends. Composite video cables don't separate a video signal's color information from its brightness, but they require a digital-to-analog conversion for digital video content; for those reasons, composite video is cheapest, yet lowest quality option.

**5.1 AUDIO****WHAT IT DOES**

A significant step up from stereo audio, 5.1 audio provides discrete channels for five speakers and a subwoofer.

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS**

You'll need at least 5.1 audio for true surround sound. The cords and jacks will look identical to stereo audio, but there are jacks for the following channels: front left, front right, rear left, rear right, center, and subwoofer. 5.1 Audio is also an analog connection.

What may seem like a minefield of jacks that's impossible to navigate and bundles of cords that leave you confused is really an advantage. Because older A/V jacks are still present on new equipment, putting the pieces of your home theater puzzle together is achievable on any budget. 

BY VINCE COGLEY



# The TV Guide, Part II

## Making It Come Together

Last month, we displayed TV technologies in part one of "The TV Guide." Now that you have a general understanding of the types of TVs you'll encounter on your pursuit for the perfect centerpiece in your home theater, you're ready for a game plan as you prepare for the challenge of actually making the all-important purchase.

But the process of buying a new TV can be just as complicated as understanding key differences between plasma and LCD flat-panel TVs. Once you clear up

some of the confusion associated with one of the biggest CE purchases you'll ever make for your home, shopping for the perfect TV will be an exhilarating and enlightening experience.

### What's In Store In The Store

So you've decided an RPTV (rear projection TV) suits you more than a flat panel; that's only half the battle. When you make your maiden voyage to the TV department of an electronics retailer, don't commit to a specific model until you've considered every angle.

If possible, observe each TV under every broadcast format—480i, 480p, 720p, and 1080i. Standard television is

480i; DVDs (with a progressive-scan capable player) show 480p; and HDTV currently comes in 720p and 1080i flavors (with 1080p on the distant horizon). Stores select their own programming to display on TVs, but don't be afraid to ask for a demonstration of content you choose.

Big-screen TVs are monumentally big but they're even bigger in their boxes. Getting such a large item from point A (the store) to point B (your home) is no easy task, so unless you have a large SUV that won't jostle the TV in transit, factor in the best option for home delivery. Having your TV delivered takes the liability out of your hands.

And once your package arrives at point B, setting it up single-handedly can be virtually impossible; make sure you have someone strong and skillful to help. In fact, certain setups such as a wall-mounted, 50-inch plasma TV are a task for a professional installer. Find out what a store charges for installation, and if the installation fee includes perks such as adjusting your TV's settings for the best possible picture.

### Shop Online

Before you buy from an online retailer, we recommend trying to see any TV you're interested in at a brick-and-mortar store first. Online recommendations can be helpful, but you can't judge a TV without seeing it.

If you encounter a deal online that's hundreds of dollars too good to be true, consider two factors. First, shipping



Mitsubishi PD-5065  
• \$5,499 • [www.mitsubishi-tv.com](http://www.mitsubishi-tv.com)

## What That Tag Means

**W**hen you're lost in a jungle of HDTVs and there isn't a sales associate in sight, you can still turn to a particular TV's price tag for helpful information. Unfortunately, a lot of this technical information might as well be in a foreign language. Once you understand the jargon, comparison shopping is much easier.

**Widescreen:** This refers to a screen's aspect ratio. See "The Dirty Dozen" sidebar for more information.

**Digital Cable Ready:** This particular TV has a built-in tuner to receive HDTV without a separate set-top box.

**Built-in HD DVR, 160GB:** An HD DVR has a larger storage capacity than a regular DVR. 160GB translates to about 20 hours of HD programming.

**Memory Card Slot:** Shutterbugs who like to share their digital photos will appreciate TVs with built-in memory card slots. If a TV has a slot that matches the memory card your digicam uses, you can create a stunning photo slideshow on the big screen.

**1,366 x 768 Resolution:** A TV's resolution indicates the number of pixels it has. This particular HDTV has 1,049,088 pixels. TVs with a 1,920 x 1,080 resolution can display 1080i and 1080p without scaling the image.

**NTSC/ATSC Tuner:** An NTSC tuner receives standard television programming and an ATSC receives high-definition programming without a set-top box.

**2 HDMI (HDCP) Inputs:** HDMI is the gold standard for A/V cables. See "The Dirty Dozen" sidebar for more information. HDCP stands for high-bandwidth digital content protection—a method for transmitting and receiving digitally-protected content.

**Component Video Input:** It's inferior to digital inputs, but component video is superior to both S-Video and composite video. Component cables break a video signal down into three color signals for a terrific picture. Buy component cables if you don't want to invest in HDMI yet.

**2 S-Video Inputs:** A step up from composite video, S-Video separates a video signal's color information from its brightness, resulting in a clearer, sharper picture.

### 50" Widescreen Digital Cable Ready Plasma HDTV

Widescreen  
Digital Cable Ready  
Built-in HD DVR, 160GB  
Memory Card Slot  
1,366 x 768 Resolution  
NTSC/ATSC Tuner  
2 HDMI (HDCP) Inputs  
Component Video Input  
2 S-Video Inputs  
As low as \$129/month 10.9% APR/48 months  
4-year Service Plan: \$299.99  
Wall mount available

#### As low as \$129/month 10.9% APR/48 months:

National consumer electronics retailers should offer financing to make expensive TVs more affordable over a period of time. Stores such as Best Buy and Circuit City only offer this financing if you sign up for a store credit card (although Circuit City's card doubles as a Visa credit card). Weigh the merits of adding another credit card to your pocketbook.

**4-year Service Plan: \$299.99:** Service plans or extended warranties are consumer electronics retailers' bread and butter because they are typically high profit margin items. If you are considering buying such a plan, ask if it covers frequently-replaced parts, such as an LCD RPTV's bulb. Then ask again.

**Wall mount available:** You'll see this option available on flat-panel plasma and LCD TVs. See the "Extra Credit" sidebar for more information on wall mounts.



## Extra Credit

**Y**our checking account may shriek as you transition from HDTV buyer to HDTV owner, but you can quickly add to the bottom line by purchasing premium accessories. Some, such as a stand, entertainment center, or wall mount, are virtually mandatory, but others aren't as vital. These accessories will put the icing on your high-definition cake.

CRT RPTVs and a limited number of microdisplays are free-standing; normally you'll need something to bring other TVs up to eye level. Some stands, such as Sony's SU-GW12 (\$499.99) are designed specifically to enhance the style of select models from the company's line. Elegant entertainment centers such as Martin Furniture's Kathy Ireland Home (www.martinfurniture.com) collections can easily cost as much as the TV itself. Expect to pay \$300 to \$500 for a decent stand.

To turn a flat-panel TV into an elegant work of art on your wall, you'll need a wall mount. Some wall mounts are compatible with a specific model, but universal wall mounts should work



with any flat-panel TV that conforms to the mount's screen size and weight specifications. Prices generally range between \$100 and \$500.

Although manufacturers should provide you with a basic set of A/V cables to connect your TV to a particular component, they're not as generous with high-end cables. For the best possible picture, use an HDMI (see "The Dirty Dozen" sidebar) cable. You'll pay for the quality: A 2m piece of Monster Cable's M1000DAV (www.monstercable.com) costs \$250. By contrast, Belkin's Blue Series S-Video cables (www.belkin.com) are a step up from standard composite video and start at \$18.99.

You know the value of a surge protector if a power surge has ever turned one of your components into a singed pile of circuitry.

Although many manufacturers will claim their surge protectors can improve picture quality, a high-quality surge protector's main purpose is keeping your expensive A/V safe from potentially dangerous power surges. Simple surge protectors cost less than \$10, but if you're serious about powering your equipment, Monster Cable's HTS7000 is a hefty \$1,299.95.

Hiring a professional installer isn't a mandatory expense, but it will save you time and eliminate the stress of setting everything up yourself. For example, our local Circuit City offered an installation package that would wall-mount our flat-panel TV, connect it to a 5.1 surround sound system, DVD player, and DVR, and conceal the wiring for \$699 (price includes wall-mount kit). ●


charges for items as large as a big screen TV can easily offset any savings you might get by buying online. Also, it doesn't hurt to take a cautious approach toward retailers without physical stores to match their online presences. There are several online retailers who resort to high-pressure tactics in an effort to add overpriced accessories to your order.

## Make A List, Check It Twice

As much as we wish we could trust our memories, there's simply too much crucial information about a gaggle of potential HDTVs to remember. Having organized notes can save time and prevent you from the faux pas of purchasing a TV without a feature you were certain it had.

Making a checklist is a simple yet effective method to keep track of the benefits and drawbacks of each TV. Include categories such as type, broadcast formats supported, inputs, screen size, and additional features. Saving space on the checklist for comments lets you include your own observations, which are what's really important. Using an individual note card for every TV that catches your eye is another tactic; keep the cards tidy by putting them in an invitation-sized envelope or bound together with a rubber band.

## Everyone Loves A Happy Ending

Thinking of buying a new HDTV as a marathon instead of a sprint will lead you to making the best possible purchase. It's certainly an intimidating process, but once you understand the basics and know what to look for, finding your match becomes much easier. 

BY VINCE COGLEY

## The Dirty Dozen: 12 TV Terms You Must Know

**W**hen you begin your quest for a new TV, don't let a smarmy sales rep bombard you with technology terms in an attempt to railroad you into a purchase. It may seem daunting at first, but having a working knowledge of these terms can make you an informed buyer before you set foot in a store.

**Aspect ratio.** A screen's aspect ratio is the measure of its width compared to its height. HD programming uses a native 16:9 ratio, so widescreen TVs with a 16:9 aspect ratio display HD content without letterboxing (black bars that appear above and below an image on a standard, nearly square TV).

**Contrast ratio.** A measure of the difference between a display's darkest black and its lightest white, contrast ratio can indicate whether a TV's blacks should be appropriately labeled dark gray. Contrast ratios are most helpful comparing two TVs of the same technology, such as an LCD with another LCD.

**EDTV (Enhanced Definition Television).** EDTV is not an inexpensive means to a high-definition picture. EDTVs, while superior to SDTV (Standard Definition Television), only support 480p (progressive-scan) and can't display HD.

**HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface).** Supports an uncompressed, all-digital A/V interface. If you use a set-top box to receive HD programming, you'll lose some quality using component video cables because they convert a digital signal to analog, but an HDMI cable maintains a pure digital-to-digital connection.

**HD Ready.** Be aware that although the ability to display 720p classifies a TV as an HDTV, HD-ready TVs require extra hardware such as a set-top box to receive HD programming.

**HDTV (High-Definition Television).** Because there are a number of specifications that fall under the umbrella of high-definition, HDTV is a little trickier. The threshold for true HDTV is at least 720p (1,280 x 720 pixel resolution in progressive-scan) and often includes digital surround sound. 720p and 1080i are the most common standards.

**Interlaced.** This method of displaying an image tricks your eyes into seeing a full image every 1/30th of a second. Interlaced signals accomplish this illusion by alternating between drawing the even- and odd-numbered lines of an image every 1/60th of a second. This can result in flicker and a poorer image than progressive-scan. The "i" in 1080i indicates the signal is interlaced.

**Pixel orbiter.** Screen burn-in is a weakness on plasma TVs, so companies have sought ways to minimize or eliminate this. A pixel orbiter shifts an image in a manner imperceptible to the naked eye. By preventing a plasma TV's pixels from displaying a static image too long, a pixel orbit greatly reduces the likelihood of burn-in.

**Progressive-scan.** This draws every line of an image at the same time in 1/60th of a second. Progressive-scan doesn't produce the same flicker as interlacing an image. Your eyes will see the difference in a sharper, brighter picture. The "p" in 720p or 1080p indicates the signal is progressive-scan.

**Rainbow effect.** DLP TVs rely on a color wheel to produce an on-screen image as an RGB (red, green, blue) combination. Other technologies display RGB simultaneously, but DLP TVs display each color individually. Most people don't notice the shift, but some will notice that color artifacts appear to leave rainbow streaks. The rainbow effect can range from entirely unnoticeable to frequently annoying.

**Screen-door effect.** This problem is most prevalent on projection LCD TVs. A small border surrounds an LCD's pixels, and the eye can occasionally detect these borders, so it looks like you're watching an image through a screen door.

**Viewing angle.** Imagine you and your friends sitting in a semicircle around a TV. A greater viewing angle means viewers at extreme angles will see roughly the same quality image as viewers positioned directly in front of the TV; conversely, a lesser angle means the images and colors blur at the edges.



# Can You Repair Your CDs & DVDs?

Scratches Possibly, Cracks No



Maxell DVD Repair Kit • \$12.99 • [www.maxell-usa.com](http://www.maxell-usa.com)

If your flicks start to flicker or your jams tend to jump, you may have a damaged DVD or CD on your hands. The shiny underside of a CD/DVD can contain digital music, movies, or software. A CD/DVD player or drive uses laser light to read the contents of the disc. If there are scratches or grime on the disc, these can block the laser for a moment, causing the music or movie to skip. If there's software on the disc, it probably won't work because the drive will think that some of the files are incomplete.

## Cleaning

Fortunately, a dirty disc is easy to fix. Using a soft, clean cloth, wipe the shiny side of the disc with an outward motion from the center hole to the outer edge, as if you were cleaning the spokes of a bicycle wheel. It might help to breathe a little water vapor on the disc before you wipe it.

Never rub or brush a disc sideways or in a circular motion. The reason is that even a soft cloth will leave tiny scratches, and a player can more easily ignore ones that cross the reading laser's path than those that run along it.

CD/DVD players can develop playback problems, too. Some older players skip when they're not sitting mostly flat, so level yours up with some playing cards under its corners if it's obviously tilted.

You can use a handyman's bubble level if you're, shall we say, a Type A personality.

Also, dust can settle on the laser lens, preventing the player from reading discs properly. Fortunately, special cleaning discs, such as 3M's Scotch AV-101 Laser Lens Cleaner (\$6.99; [solutions.3m.com](http://solutions.3m.com)) and Memorex's CD/DVD-Player Laser-Lens Cleaner (\$9.99; [www.memorex.com](http://www.memorex.com)), don't cost much. Buy one, pop it into your player for a few moments, and then try your skipping disc again to see whether the playback improves.

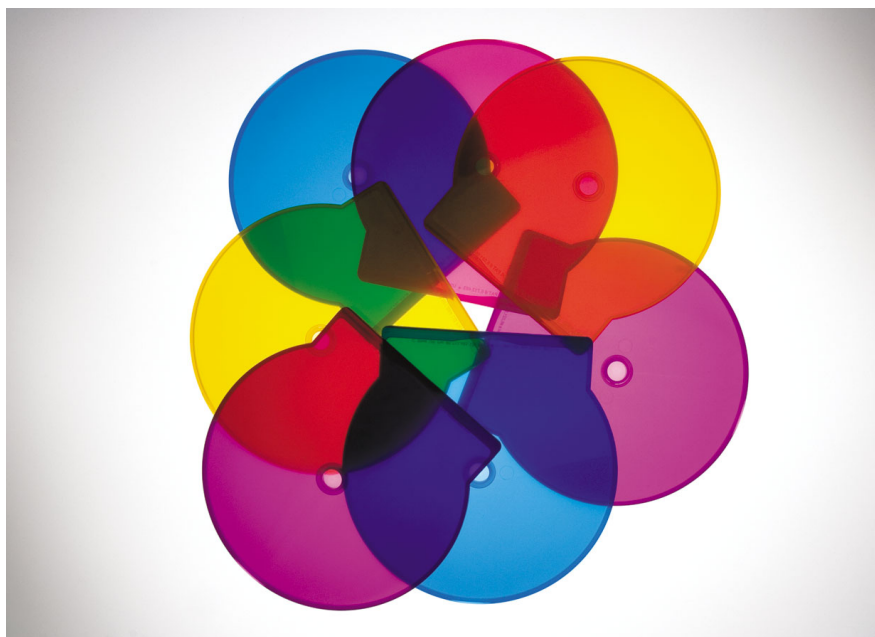
## Repair

If a light wiping doesn't fix the problem, you could try a disc repair product. Many come with liquids, sprays, and/or cleaning or buffing wipes, such as Maxell's DVD Repair Kit (\$12.99; [www.maxell-usa.com](http://www.maxell-usa.com)).

Some sprays simply clean a disc's surface. Others are supposed to fill in the grooves of minor scratches, theoretically making it easier for the laser to shine through them.

Still other fluids, such as the Wipe Out line (\$9.99 to \$17.99; [www.cdrepair.com](http://www.cdrepair.com)), contain abrasives. Abrasives can polish out deep scratches or, rather, smooth their edges and reduce the surrounding surface enough to let the disc play again. CDs and DVDs have plastic coatings over their shiny recording layers, so you don't have to worry about damaging the data unless you really go overboard with the polishing.

If your disc is scratched enough to make abrasive polishing sound good, consider a battery-powered device such as Aleratec's DVD/CD Disc Repair Plus (\$39.99; [www.aleratec.com](http://www.aleratec.com)) for a more uniform surface than you'd get by rubbing with a cloth. Hand-turned polishers, such as 3M's Scotch AV-1160DVD DVD Disc Cleaner & Repair



Kit (\$14.99), are usually less expensive. Devices such as these may cost more than a new DVD, but most of them come with enough fluid and abrasive wheels to fix 10 or more discs.

Some polishing devices leave visible swirl marks on a disc. In rare cases, these marks might actually make playback worse in older CD/DVD players, but the discs should work fine in more recent equipment. You should always replace or clean your polisher's abrasive surfaces as recommended.

Some polishing devices leave visible swirl marks on a disc. In rare cases, these marks might actually make playback worse in older CD/DVD players, but the discs should work fine in more recent equipment. You should always replace or clean your polisher's abrasive surfaces as recommended.


## Careful Copying

Some discs play OK in one device, such as your computer's CD/DVD drive, but are a little too scratchy for your old stereo equipment. If the disc is a CD, you might try using software such as Nero (\$79.99 and up; [www.nero.com](http://www.nero.com)) or Roxio (\$79.95 and up; [www.roxio.com](http://www.roxio.com)) to copy the disc to a shiny new CD-R that may play better in an older player. You might also rip the CD's songs to your computer's hard drive,

as this process occasionally corrects some skips and pops caused by scratches over the original tracks. As you copy the CD or convert it to music files, set the software to its slowest read setting (such as 4X) and its most thorough encoding setting.

Movie DVDs generally have copy prevention technology on them at Hollywood's insistence, so you can't legally back up your discs nor rip them to try and correct errors. Your only recourse is to try a CD/DVD repair product or buy a new DVD.

## Great Expectations

Prepare yourself for the fact that you simply can't fix some discs. Broken, cracked, or deeply scratched CDs and DVDs are usually beyond salvage. And a cracked disc can fly apart inside a drive or player . . . and then you'll need another repair article entirely. 

BY MARTY SEMS



## tips

### Tweak Your Home-Theater Speakers

# 1

#### The Art Of Tweaking Speakers

Think of tweaking your speakers as more of an art than a science. To get your system sounding its best, adjust settings from their defaults. However, before you go hog wild searching for the best sound, grab a pen and paper and jot down the default settings in case you get to a point where you don't like the sound but can't seem to get it back to the way it was before.

# 2

#### Read The Manual First

Spend time with the users manual for your speakers. It will give you quick tips on how to diffuse potentially hairy situations such as unpacking your speakers. (After all, a good set of speakers can cost thousands of dollars, so it would be a shame to damage them before they could even sound their first notes.) The manual should give you points on proper speaker placement in your theater, as well as great ideas on speaker maintenance, so that you can get the longest life possible out of your woofers and tweeters.

# 3

#### Test Before You Buy

If you're in the market for home-theater speakers, thoroughly test them before you buy. Take a favorite CD or DVD with you to play on a few systems. Sound quality is one of the most important features in a home-theater system, so search for a song/movie clip that lets you test the low, mid, and high tones that a speaker system can produce.

# 4

#### Be Wary Of Metal Hollows

If your metal home-theater rack let's you route A/V cables through a hollow section, be cautious. Your setup will look better, but sometimes when metal displays are cast or welded, burrs are left that can cut your wires (not to mention your fingers). Split loom tubing is a cheap alternative that will still make your display look sharp while keeping your wires safe. As the name implies, this tubing has a split down the center. It's handy because wires can enter or exit the tubing at any point. You can fix it to your entertainment center to keep it and your wires well-hidden. Split loom tubing comes in a variety of diameters, so you shouldn't have trouble finding one that can satisfy your wiring needs.

# 5

#### Home-Theater Furniture

Furniture plays a huge role in how well your home-theater speakers sound. Bulky or well-stuffed furniture, though comfortable, will muffle and absorb a ton of sound, especially when it comes to low bass and high treble tones. Conversely, hardwood or plastic furniture isn't the most comfortable, and it can cause noticeable reverberation. This type of furniture has a tendency to brighten sound and make it abrasive enough to take the paint off of your walls.



BY SAM EVANS



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# Technology & Kids

## Parenting The Google Generation

**I**n 1994, an editor at a family computing magazine in Massachusetts came home from work one day and found his towheaded 3-year-old daughter, Minta, sitting at her family's computer. She was perched on an ergonomic office chair, her little legs kicking the air absently. Her back was to her father, and when he said, "Hi, Minta! I'm home. What're you doing?" She slowly spun her chair around to face him and said, quite matter-of-factly, "Building a civilization."

Minta was playing *SimCity*, a popular computer game created by Maxis ([www.maxis.com](http://www.maxis.com)) and distributed by Broderbund ([www.broderbund.com](http://www.broderbund.com)) in 1989. In it, players built and managed their own civilizations from the ground up. It was intended for much older children and adults, but Minta, as with many of the children in her

generation, took to the computer like a duck to water. While her parents had been excited about Pogo Sticks, Big Wheels, and Lincoln Logs as kids, Minta, like many of her peers in the early 1990s, could operate a VCR, a remote control, and a PC running Windows 3.1, before she had even entered kindergarten.

### That '70s Childhood

The children and teens of the 1970s and 1980s were the first to encounter VCRs, personal computers, and video games, and those advancements were new and exciting additions to a world that still involved rotary dial phones, TVs that received only three channels, typewriters, and homes primarily filled with traditional toys such as Legos, board games, and yo-yos.


It has been their children (and younger siblings) who have grown up in a world where high technology is ubiquitous. Today's middle and high schoolers are accustomed to instant messaging, interactive video games, and navigating Web-based content delivered to them at high speeds. The notion that one would have to be tethered to a phone by its curly-Q cord—or even stay inside a home to speak on the phone—is as unthinkable as the notion that one



would have to leaf through a musty card catalog in order to find the title of a book.

## CE Balancing Act

The advent of personal computers and other technologies has dramatically changed the way children live and learn in our culture. Children such as Minta have benefited from the ability to use their creative powers for more than just backyard play—they can actually envision and build an empire on their computers, if they choose.

But for parents, the question of how to integrate important technologies into learning at home, while also keeping kids safe, healthy, and able to form active imaginations and meaningful social relationships, is difficult. Knowing which brands and products to trust and how (and to what extent) to incorporate them at home, presents a serious challenge. But, as children of the Google generation know, information is power. So, to help parents capitalize on their kids' tech-savvy childhoods, we've gathered some of the best CE devices for kids and families that the market has to offer. 

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

## Then & Now

You can trace the roots of most of the high-tech toys, games, and learning tools we buy for kids today back to inventions that were part of our (or our parents') youths. Here we connect the lineage of a few of today's most popular gadgets, games, and concepts to their counterparts from another era:

Old School	New Cool Equivalent
Sesame Street	Sesame Beginnings DVDs
ViewMaster	GameBoy
Pong	Xbox 360
Star Wars action figures	Star Wars action figures
Comic books	DVD movie versions
Cordless phone	Cellular Phone
Sony Cassette Walkman	Apple iPod
Cable TV	TiVo
Magnetic alphabet	Leapster Learning Game System
Trapper Keeper	Palm Pilot
Travel Parcheesi	Personal DVD player
Tin can with string	Text messaging
Library card	Google
Cardboard box the fridge came in	Cardboard box with cow spots
Record albums	MP3 files
Hi-fi	Wi-Fi
Baby monitor	CYBER-sitter
Super 8 film	Sony DVD Handycam





## Favorite Brands

Experts are still struggling to come to a clear conclusion about whether there is any benefit (or possibly any harm) to introducing electronic media to babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. In 1999 the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended no screen time at all (that includes TV) for babies younger than 2 years old. The Kaiser Family Foundation released a report in December 2005 that indicates that there is almost no research

to support the idea that electronic media has any educational value for children under the age of 5. Parents, however, seem to disagree. Since the late 1990s, there has been a deluge of CE products intended to give young children a head start on formal education, and despite warnings from pediatricians and educators, the market is thriving, which means parents and grandparents are buying. Among the strongest sellers are tried and true

brands such as Fisher-Price, which even offers online games including electronic peek-a-boo for babies, as well as relative newcomers to the field of early learning toys such as Vtech, which offers many award-winning electronic educational toys for children from preschool to high school. Here, we recommend some popular brands and products for children of all ages, with a reminder that for small children, screen time should be limited. ●

### Babies:

Sesame Beginnings DVDs (\$12.90; [www.sesameworkshop.org](http://www.sesameworkshop.org)), created by Sesame Workshop and distributed by Sony Wonder ([www.sonywonder.com](http://www.sonywonder.com)) in stores in late March 2006.



### Toddlers:

LeapFrog LittleTouch LeapPad Learning System (\$39.99; [www.leapfrog.com](http://www.leapfrog.com)).



### Preschoolers:

V.Smile TV Learning System from Vtech (\$59.99; [www.vtech.com](http://www.vtech.com)).



### Elementary school:

Vtech Nitro Notebook (\$49.99; [www.vtech.com](http://www.vtech.com)).

### Middle school:

FLY Pentop Computer (\$99.99; [www.flypentop.com](http://www.flypentop.com)) or iQuest Handheld (\$49.99; [www.leapfrog.com](http://www.leapfrog.com)).



### High school:

Palm Zire 72 handheld (\$249; [www.palm.com/us](http://www.palm.com/us)).



# Consumer Electronics Age Guidelines

**C**hildren are individuals, of course, with their own unique personalities, preferences, and quirks. Developmentally speaking, however, there is much more consistency among children—with some variation being perfectly normal—regarding what types of items are appropriate for their needs at a given age.

And so it goes with electronics. Here's a concise rundown of guidelines that parents might want to consider when they or their children use CE devices, along with a few age-appropriate suggestions. **CE**

BY BRIAN HODGE

## Infant/Toddler

Although there is a growing electronics-for-babies industry, it doesn't make much sense to buy gadgets for a tiny person who will be just as delighted with the box. As they leave the crib, little ones will naturally be curious about things such as remote controls—and you should let them experiment with harmless items under supervision—but development experts generally agree that very young children are better off with sturdy items that stimulate them with shapes, colors, textures, etc. At this age, electronics are better suited for parental use.

### Recommended:

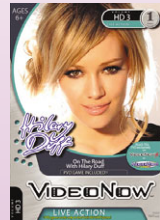
- \* Bebe Sounds' Angelcare Movement Sensor With Sound Monitor And 2 Parents' Units (\$99.99; [www.bebe-sounds.com](http://www.bebe-sounds.com)).  
This motion sensor monitors your baby's sleep and alerts you if she's gone absolutely still for 20 seconds.
- \* Dex Products Sound Sleeper (\$19.99; [www.dexproducts.com](http://www.dexproducts.com))  
This plays a variety of sounds—including those of the womb—to block external noise and soothe babies to sleep. Pediatricians stress that babies need to learn to sleep unaided, so this shouldn't be used all the time, only when sleep is a real priority, and you need a little help.

## Grade-schooler

At this age kids enjoy much more autonomy, although supervision should still be the rule, especially when they're poking around complex or expensive devices, such as the connections on your multichannel home-theater receiver. Age-appropriate items can be fun and educational, teaching playful competition, hand-eye coordination, and strategy.

### Recommended:

- \* Hasbro VIDEONOW XP Personal Video Player (\$49.99; [www.hasbro.com](http://www.hasbro.com))  
This portable unit plays over 100 PVDs (Personal Video Discs, a proprietary disc format; titles \$5.99 and up) and has controls for interactive features, games, and more.



- \* LeapFrog FLY Pentop Computer (\$99.99; [www.flypentop.com](http://www.flypentop.com))  
This fat, computerized ballpoint has dozens of fun and educational uses. Visit the Web site for a superb interactive demo.

## Teenager

By now, most kids have the dexterity and sense of responsibility to operate items such as digital cameras and camcorders without you constantly hovering over their shoulders. Socialization is in full swing, hand-eye coordination is being refined, and long-term interests and skills are emerging, so anything that promotes these is a good bet.

### Recommended:

- \* Apple iPod nano (\$199 and \$249; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com))  
According to a November 2005 study by the CEA (Consumer Electronics Association), portable MP3 players are the top-ranked CE item that teenagers crave.
- \* Kodak EasyShare V530 Zoom Digital Camera (\$299.95; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com))  
Digicams rank high with teens, too, and this stylish compact also excels at shooting short movies.





# Consumer Electronics & Your Baby (& Toddler, Too!)

Switch On A Little Parenting Help



Summer Infant Baby Quiet Sounds Video Monitor Set  
\$169.99 • [www.summerinfant.com](http://www.summerinfant.com)

**B**ecoming a parent puts your life through some big changes. In fact, parenthood's more blunt-spoken representatives may tell you that it whisks away any semblance of the life you knew and replaces it with another life altogether. Not that that's necessarily a bad thing!

It doesn't help, though, when parenthood becomes a predominantly isolating experience. Some loss of social contact is inevitable, and the new rewards usually more than compensate for that. But when your new responsibilities become a genuine barrier between you and your friends, the rest of your family, and even your partner . . . well, you can feel that things are out of balance, and it's only natural that you want to restore some of your old equilibrium.

Let's look at some gadgets that can help you bridge that divide, or make life a little easier on everyone, whether you're simply getting through the day or want to preserve part of it for posterity.

## CE Phone Home

The telephone isn't just the world's most omnipresent CE device, it's also a lifeline

in an emergency or if you need a few minutes of conversation to keep in touch with someone you don't see often.

**Cell phone.** If you're usually on-the-go, a mobile phone is mandatory these days. Ideally, you'll have something that's cleanly designed and simple to use when you don't want distractions but still puts several handy tools at your disposal. That may include a built-in camera, whose impromptu snapshots can keep a working parent or adoring grandparents connected to your child's day even though many miles may lie in between.

Although your options will depend on your carrier, we love the features and design of LG Electronics' PM225 camera phone for Sprint (\$219.99, free with new service plan; [us.lge.com](http://us.lge.com)). It has a speaker-phone setting, mobile Web capability, a personal organizer/calendar, voice activated dialing, and two LCDs—one being a small external display with caller ID.

**For your landline.** Around the house, many people don't rely on cell phones—especially if their service plan has a monthly minute limit—but rather, cordless handsets. They're portable, sure, but they can tie up one hand or give you neck pains from wedging the phone between your ear and shoulder.

A headset will solve both problems, assuming your handset has a headset jack. We find that calls come through loud and clear with Panasonic's KX-TCA92 (\$29.95; [www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com)), which features a folding headband, cushioned earpiece, and an adjustable mic boom.

## Digital Camera

A cell phone camera is handy for spur-of-the-moment shots, but few people consider it a *real* camera: one that delivers high-quality keepers suitable for framing.

Digital SLRs lead the pack in creative control, but they're bulky and can require

## Lugging It All Around

Leaving home with an infant means carrying around lots of stuff. But loading up with a purse, diaper bag, camera case, and more can leave you feeling more like a pack mule than a parent. Instead, consolidate everything in a roomy, compartmented, and fashionable tote bag.

Posh By Tori ([www.poshbytori.com](http://www.poshbytori.com)) offers a line of diaper/travel bags starting at \$129, featuring holders for bottles and your cell phone, interior and exterior pockets, and 850-cubic inch interiors.

Then there is Timbuk2's ([www.timbuk2.com](http://www.timbuk2.com)) colorful Cargo Tote line. These start at \$50 and come in four sizes (from 743 to 3,067 cubic inches), each with a waterproof vinyl liner, bottle holder, and interior and exterior pockets. ●

extra time and attention to use properly. Boasting convenience, as well as quality, a good compact digicam will perform just as well for all but the artist inspirations.

Each camera manufacturer has an extensive line of compacts, so it's a buyer's market. Still, we don't hesitate to recommend Canon's PowerShot A610 (\$349.99; [consumer.usa.canon.com](http://consumer.usa.canon.com)) as a superb camera for everyday use; it has numerous modes and presets for point-and-shoot ease. Its 5MP resolution will deliver frame-worthy prints, its 4X zoom lens covers a lot of distance for a compact, and its shape gives you something to hang onto when you need one hand free.

Cameras immortalize moments, but camcorders capture events: the determined

progress of your child's first steps, the breakthrough when babble becomes words, the flying cake at a 2-year-old's birthday party.

We've always been impressed with JVC's combination of quality and value. Its Everio GZ-MG20 camcorder (\$699.99; [www.jvc.com](http://www.jvc.com)) adds innovation to that list. Forget about fussing with tapes or discs—this records widescreen DVD-quality video to a built-in 20GB hard drive, yet it's compact and light, weighing just 13.4 ounces even with the battery attached. You can edit directly on the drive itself, transfer video to a computer with a USB 2.0 cable, and a floating suspension system protects the drive from shocks, so it's a forward-thinking purchase.

## Mobile GPS System

If you do much family traveling, you know the value of minimizing hassles en route . . . staying the course and not getting lost, especially when you have a squalling toddler in the backseat carrier.

An automobile GPS navigator will keep your journey on track and let everybody save face. Check out Garmin's StreetPilot i3 (\$428.56; [www.garmin.com](http://www.garmin.com)). It mounts to your vehicle's dashboard with a suction cup, and you can input your destination for turn-by-turn directions throughout North America, find points of interest along the way, and so on.

## iPod

The iPod (\$299 30GB, \$399 60GB; [www.apple.com/ipod](http://www.apple.com/ipod)) is a parent's little helper? With the fifth and most recent generation, the iPod's transformation into a well-rounded audio-visual device is complete. The ability to display full-color snapshots, introduced in the 4G photo iPod, is standard on all full-size players, along with video playback capability.

That makes the latest iPod an amazingly compact image library that you can



stuff with hundreds of photos and home videos and then view and share anywhere. Although digital video clips need to be properly formatted, you can easily handle the conversion with Apple's QuickTime 7 Pro software (\$29.99).

Oh yeah—whenever the rigors of child-rearing leave you in need of a relaxing break or an energizing pick-me-up, the iPod still plays music, too.

### Baby Monitor

Most parents feel much more at ease when they can stay attuned to their baby even when they're not in the nursery. Summer Infant Baby's Quiet Sounds Video Monitor Set (\$169.99; [www.summerinfant.com](http://www.summerinfant.com)) is a complete monitoring system that lets you keep an eye and/or ear on your baby at all times, even in the dark.

### Software

That makes plenty of hardware. What about programs for the one piece of

## The New Parents Survival Kit

These are the gadgets you'll probably find most indispensable:

- \* Camera phone
- \* Phone headset
- \* Digital camera
- \* Camcorder
- \* Financial software
- \* Roomy tote bag



Panasonic KX-TCA92 • \$29.95 • [www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com)

hardware you probably already have—your PC?


**Organizational.** Because Microsoft has such a lock on productivity software, you may already use its Office Suite (\$399 Standard Edition; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)), in which case Outlook (PC) or Entourage (Mac) is probably your email program of choice. For many people, email and the address book are as far as they dig into these programs. If that sounds like you, you're ignoring their powerful, flexible calendars that will help you schedule appointments by the day, week, or month.

**Financial.** Money matters are often cited as the No. 1 cause of arguments between couples . . . and whatever you can do to avoid arguments will benefit you and your children. Financial software won't generate extra income, but can certainly help you better handle what you have.

Financial software won't generate extra income, but can certainly help you better handle what you have.

you need it.

### Time For Reinforcements

Since time immemorial, parents have been raising children without the benefit of electronics. Then again, for most of that history, the pace of life was much slower. These days, you can never have too much help, even if batteries are required. 

BY BRIAN HODGE

# More Audio. More Video.



Hear Sound All Around

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# CE For Grade-schoolers

How Should You Introduce Your Kids To Electronics?



**W**hen used properly, computers and other electronic devices serve as great educational and entertainment devices for kids. However, grade-schoolers lack the maturity to select for themselves products with educational value or to self-monitor their use of those devices.

So, it's up to Mom and Dad to make those decisions and enforce rules of use. And if you're like many parents, you'll have more questions than answers when deciding which products will give your kids the most value for the price. To help you we asked elementary teachers for their advice on good products and how to guide kids in using these devices.

## Back To The Basics

Every so often, we hear news of a study that supports the obvious: Reading to your kids is beneficial, for instance. But did you ever think how something so basic as reading to children can help them get the most out of electronic devices?

Stella Perry, a fourth grade teacher at Broad Street School in Bridgeton, N.J., knows from her experience as an educator, mother, and grandmother that kids who are read to from an early age typically understand how to use educational products faster than other kids. "Even toddlers who may not be able to verbalize what they know still understand a lot," says Perry. Perry believes such children more quickly understand the audio instructions built into electronic toys, and she recommends that you treat the product as you would a book: Sit down and share the experience

with your child. If you take the time to demonstrate the fundamentals of a toy or game, you'll be amazed at how quickly children will catch on.

**Fool them with fun.** When choosing products for her children, grandchildren, and students, Perry follows one rule without exception: no violence. She shuns games and products that include any amount of violence.

Jack Sibert, the computer instructor at Cavett Elementary School in Lincoln, Neb., agrees. Sibert recommends that parents who have grade-schoolers avoid buying their children console game systems, handheld gaming systems, or similar products that contain violence.

Instead, look for educational toys and games that help your children learn and sharpen their reading, math, science, health, geography, and critical thinking skills. Perry says good educational games and computer programs are those disguised as fun (see the "Educational Products" sidebar), so don't be surprised if your kids beg to play a game, go to a Web site, or use their toy notebooks every day. Sibert says to look for games, devices, and software that "build on learning," as opposed to items that have a "once through, and I'm done" approach.

Both Perry and Sibert recommend LeapFrog games and educational toys, such as the LeapPad line of learning systems (\$34.99 and up; [www.leapfrog.com](http://www.leapfrog.com)), which teach and reinforce basic skills in reading, writing, math, history, and science. Kids insert a book and cartridge in the LeapPad and then use the "magic pen" to touch and listen to interactive pages. Book and cartridge sets start at \$14.99 and incorporate popular characters such as Spider-Man, The Incredibles, and Shrek. The cover of the book set indicates which LeapPad the set works with.

Sibert also says parents can trust computer programs they buy from

## Educational Products

The following companies have earned a solid reputation for their quality educational products:

### Educational Insights

[www.edin.com](http://www.edin.com)

Hot Dots Reading Comprehension sets (\$14.99; grades 2 to 6) contain 50 stories each. Kids answer questions using the Hot Dots Power Pen (\$9.99). Younger kids can learn to read analog and digital time displays with the Learn All Day Clock (\$79.99), a real working clock on which you can change the time to test your child's understanding.

### LeapFrog

[www.leapfrog.com](http://www.leapfrog.com)

In addition to four LeapPad systems, LeapFrog sells age-appropriate items such as Leap's Phonics Library (\$19.99; ages 3 and up), Turbo Extreme (\$34.99; ages 6 to 8); and Mind Mania Spelling (\$14.99; ages 7 and up).

### Learning Journey

[www.tlji.com](http://www.tlji.com)

Once you see the bright, colorful designs on the Spell & Write Pencil Box (\$29.99; 3 and up), the talking

Pig E Bank (\$14.99; 3 and up), the bilingual PC Schoolhouse laptop (\$49.99; 3 and up), and the Desktop PC (\$49.99; ages 5 and up), you'll understand why Learning Journey products have won many awards and recommendations from parents and educators.

### VTech Kids

[www.vtechkids.com](http://www.vtechkids.com)

The new V.Smile TV Learning System (\$59.99; ages 3 to 7) can transform the boob tube into brain food. This gaming system teaches kids lessons in reading, science, and math while they play games that come in "Smartridges." Connect the V.Smile Art Studio (\$29.99; ages 5 and up) to the learning system, so your budding artist can draw on the palette-shaped drawing pad and view his artwork on the TV screen. The portable V.Smile Pocket (\$89.99) plays Smartridges and can connect to a TV.

For older kids, the DeskPro (\$69.99; ages 7 and up) and Touch Tablet (\$99.99; ages 8 and up) give them learning time on computers packed with interactive educational games. ●

Knowledge Adventure ([www.knowledgeadventure.com](http://www.knowledgeadventure.com)), Edmark ([www.kids.click/edmark](http://www.kids.click/edmark)), The Learning Company ([www.learningcompany.com](http://www.learningcompany.com)), and Broderbund ([www.broderbund.com](http://www.broderbund.com)), the latter two owned by Riverdeep.

**Involve the family.** One of the biggest drawbacks to CE products, even educational items geared for kids, is that they can isolate the user. There's nothing wrong with kids having "alone time" with a good book or game, but locking themselves in their rooms to play computer

games all afternoon, day after day, isn't in their best interests.

Perry advises keeping the computer your kids use in the family room, so you can keep an eye on how they use it (and how often). This will help you monitor content, as well as time.

Keeping the PC and other CE devices out in the open also encourages the family to play together. Older siblings, for instance, can help teach younger kids how to use a program or listen to them read a story



on a LeapPad. Once you buy the system, you can build a library of books. Not only do LeapPad products grow with children, but they also can be passed down and used by younger siblings.

Perry and her husband, John Perry, encourage collaboration among children of different ages at their school, too. John is the technology specialist and instructor of computing at Broad Street School. Sometimes students in Stella's fourth-grade class help first graders learn a program in John's computing class; the older students, Stella Perry says, have just as much fun as the younger ones.

**Limit use of handheld games.** In December 2005, to commemorate its 20th

## Safe, Online Learning

Your child's elementary school may incorporate online learning into its students' curriculum. If so, check with the school's computer instructor or visit the school's Web site for recommendations. For instance, Cavett Elementary's Jack Sibert directed us to his school's Web site ([cavett.lps.org](http://cavett.lps.org)), which lists links to many good educational online spots.

Your kids also can play and learn safely at these trusted Web sites.



**MathCafe.com**  
[www.mathcafe.com](http://www.mathcafe.com)



**Nick Jr.**  
[www.nickjr.com](http://www.nickjr.com)



**PBS Kids**  
[www.pbskids.org](http://www.pbskids.org)



**Sesame Street**  
[www.sesameworkshop.org/sesamestreet](http://www.sesameworkshop.org/sesamestreet)



**Starfall**  
[www.starfall.com](http://www.starfall.com)

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anniversary, Nintendo released a limited-edition Game Boy. As popular as Game Boys are, educators suggest you limit the use of those and other handheld games.

"I'm not a believer in handheld games," Stella Perry says, "except for use in the car." Rather than let your kids spend hours on relatively mindless entertainment like that, it's far better to read with them or play board games, she suggests.


**Look for bargains.** Make the most of the devices, games, and software you buy for your kids. Buying a PC or notebook may be cost prohibitive, and make sure any games or devices are age-range appropriate, so they don't immediately outgrow them. On a broadcast of NPR's "All Things Considered" last November, *New York Times* technology writer David Pogue said that sales of educational software are only 33% of what they were just five years ago. Taking their place are educational and gaming consoles, such as the go-anywhere LeapPad. Consequently, some of the educational software for PCs may be available at substantial discounts.

Perry suggests you use the Freecycle Web site ([www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)). This site lets you

search for items that others in your area may not need anymore or find people who want what you no longer need. Freecycle and yard/garage sales are good sources for software, too. Although children's software isn't as popular as it once was, that doesn't mean you should avoid PC programs altogether.

John Perry still uses the Living Book Series, programs formerly published by Broderbund that help younger students read classic stories and books on PCs.

Your children need your guidance, rules, and assistance as they learn from their educational electronic devices. Exercise your authority, but remember that kids are a little more sophisticated in this area than you might think. Sibert says that children "have a curiosity and ease in using computers. They [are growing up] with computers and are not afraid to experiment and try new things."

When possible, let your children cultivate that curiosity with appropriate CE products. But remember, Sibert says, even the best CE devices are a means, not an end, to a good education. 

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

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# CE & The Tween Years

Tweens Are A Marketer's Dream

Bratz Plugged-In Liptunes MP3 Player • \$79.99 • [www.mgae.com](http://www.mgae.com)



**K**ids are great consumers. Manufacturers know it. Advertisers know it. And your wallet probably knows it, too.

The 20 million or so American tweens, generally defined as kids aged 8 to 12, spend a lot and influence even more buying decisions. "They are very brand aware and have strong opinions about those brands," says Paul Metz, vice president of C&R Research Services in Chicago, which operates the self-reporting Web survey site KidzEyes.com for kids aged 6 to 12. "They influence a ton of spending, and they know how to ask for things," Metz says.

Tweens might not have driver's licenses or jobs, but they have plenty of clout, both with marketers and their parents.

## Kids With Clout

Unlike most preschoolers and early grade-schoolers, tweens care very much about what their peers think. This means they won't always settle for products that their parents select for them. They want to fit in, and that means having the right brands, often endorsed by their favorite stars: Hilary Duff, Jesse McCartney, and Raven Symone, to name a few.

At the same time, tweens do have some of their own money to spend. The 2005 Roper Youth Report, from marketing research firm GfK NOP ([www.gfkamerica.com](http://www.gfkamerica.com)), shows that tweens and teens on average earn more than \$29 a week. The 360 Youth Web site ([www.360youth.com](http://www.360youth.com)) estimates that tweens spend \$51

billion annually, funds they receive as gifts or allowance.

Whether kids are given money or earn it through chores or baby-sitting, the 20 million or so tweens in America have some income and no significant financial obligations (except for the handful of kids whose parents require them to contribute for extras). That puts them in the perfect spot to spend their money and influence many of their parents' purchases.

Parents turn to their kids for advice on anything from picking a cell phone carrier to choosing an Internet provider. According to the Youth Report, 30% of kids aged 8 to 17 say they are involved in making buying decisions for the family.

"Tweens are experimenters and are feature crazy" when it comes to CE products, Metz explains. "They have the idle time to check out all the features" of a product, such as a cell phone. (See the "What Tweens Want" sidebar.)

Tweens and young teens are at a perfect nagging stage, too. A poll commissioned by the Center For A New American Dream ([www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org)) found that of kids aged 12 to 17, the 12- and 13-year-olds are the most likely to keep nagging their parents for products they want.

## Products With Appeal

Given all their influence and spending power, it's only natural that tweens are starting to command a niche market in the CE field. The following types of devices are especially appealing to them.

**Cell phones.** Older tweens are far more likely to use cell phones than their younger counterparts. Metz says that his firm's research shows cell phone ownership grows as kids in this group get older. Among kids 8 to 10, only 9% have a cell phone. That number jumps to 23% for 11-year-olds, and climbs to 32% for 12-year-olds.

Understandably, cell phones that are specifically made for tweens are marketed to appeal to the parents. Parents who want their kids, especially younger tweens, to have a cell phone do so as a way of keeping tabs on their children's whereabouts. For the sake of safety, manufacturers are rolling out phones that parents can program to limit incoming and outgoing calls.

The Firefly phone from Firefly Mobile (\$99.99; [www.fireflymobile.com](http://www.fireflymobile.com)), for instance, is designed for kids 12 and younger. Instead of a full key pad, the Firefly has only five keys, two of which can be programmed to give a child speed-dial access to her mom and dad. Parents can program as many as 22 outgoing phone numbers and can set the phone to receive calls only from those pre-programmed numbers.

Service for the Firefly is available on the Cingular Wireless ([www.cingular.com](http://www.cingular.com)) FamilyTalk plan for an additional \$9.99 a month. Or you can prepay minutes for the Firefly through the Firefly Mobile Web site at 25 cents a minute.

Another mobile phone option for tweens is the Enfora TicTalk (\$99; [www.mytictalk.com](http://www.mytictalk.com)). It looks a bit like a handheld gaming unit and functions like a walkie-talkie because it lacks a traditional keypad. Parents control all communication settings through the TicTalk Web site, including whom the child can place calls to and receive calls from. You also can text message your child through the site. You'll find five Leap-Frog learning games on the phone.

Pay-as-you-go rates for the TicTalk begin at \$25 for 100 minutes.

**MP3 players.** We've mentioned that tweens are brand-conscious. Nowhere is that more true than with MP3 players, where *the* brand of choice is the Apple iPod ([www.apple.com/ipod](http://www.apple.com/ipod)). "Kids have told us that they would be embarrassed

to show up at school with anything but an iPod," Metz says. "That brand is the only feature they want in an MP3 player."

The 512MB iPod shuffle (\$99) can hold 120 songs and runs on a 12-hour rechargeable battery. Your tweens may beg for an iPod that holds more songs. If so, you could opt for the 1GB shuffle (\$129) or go with the 2GB iPod nano (\$199). Or you could respond as a friend

## Rules To Play By

1. Keep the computers that your tweens use in a public area of the house, such as the family room or kitchen. Use the parental controls included in your browser to limit their online access.

2. Teach your tweens that use of their CE devices, especially for playing games, must be earned. Allow gaming only when they have finished their homework and met their other obligations.

3. Discuss with your tween the list of accepted people with whom she can communicate via her cell phone, including text messaging.

4. Make sure your tween understands his cell phone's service plan and knows who is responsible for paying extra charges he incurs.

5. Make sure your tween's friends know your "house rules" regarding the use of computers, cell phones, gaming devices, etc. and make sure you know the house rules when your daughter visits her friends' homes. When your child spends time at another family's home, instruct her that your rules, if more stringent, still apply.



## What Tweens Want

Researcher Paul Metz says that games are the hottest feature on CE devices for tweens. But these kids are also crazy about instant messaging—"it's the new version of passing notes," Metz jokes. These two features appeal to what this age group likes to do the most: Have fun and keep in touch with friends.

In addition, because tweens value their growing independence and individuality, they love the ability to customize devices so they reflect their interests and personalities, whether changing the faceplate of a cell phone or downloading new ringtones.

Tweens also love devices they can upgrade, which appeals to their desire to keep up with their peers. Finally, older tweens gravitate toward devices that are adult-looking, especially phones and MP3 players, Metz says. ●

did when his tween daughter requested a larger iPod: "How many songs do you even know?"

If iPods are out of your price range, then there are other options, especially for younger tweens. MGA Entertainment makes the Bratz Plugged In Liptunes MP3 player (\$79.99; [www.mgae.com](http://www.mgae.com)), a 256MB player shaped like a tube of lipstick. It comes with earbuds, attachments for the arm and belt, a USB cable, and music management software.

Disney sells digital Mix Sticks (\$49.99; [disneyshopping.go.com](http://disneyshopping.go.com)) in Princess and Mickey Mouse motifs. The 128MB sticks can be expanded up to 1GB with an SD/MMC card and play both downloaded music and Disney Mix Clips, which are sold separately.

**Media players.** When your minivan or SUV becomes a second home to your kids, they may be ideal candidates for products that can keep them content in the back seat, such as DVD and multimedia players.

Samsung designed its Hand Held Mini DVD Player (\$149.99; [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)) for kids under the age of 15. It has a 2.5-inch screen, plays 3-inch mini DVDs, and gives 2.5 hours of playback on Ni-MH (nickel metal hydride) batteries, which are included. It also comes with a DC power jack and headphone jack.

Mustek's line of multimedia players appeals to older tweens because they sport a more mature look. Products include the 3.6-inch PL736 (\$159; [www.mustek.com](http://www.mustek.com)) and the 10-inch, widescreen-format PL510T (\$349). Both units let kids view digital pictures and play CDs; in addition, they have rechargeable battery packs and AC adapters. These items are pricier but will grow with your tweens into their teen years and beyond.

### The Perfect Tween Device


Metz says his firm's annual wish list survey shows that more tweens have



Both the Mattel Juice Box (\$69.99; [www.juicebox.com](http://www.juicebox.com)) and the VUGO from Hasbro's Tiger Electronics (\$119.99; [www.hasbro.com](http://www.hasbro.com)) are designed with pre-teens in mind. The Juice Box runs on three AAA batteries, plays content on Juiceware cartridges, and has an optional MP3 adapter. Kids can download episodes of popular Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon programs from the VUGO Web site ([www.vugo.com](http://www.vugo.com)) or use their viewer to play music and display pictures on the 3-inch screen. The 128MB VUGO's memory can be expanded with a memory card, and the unit runs on four AAA batteries, which are not included.

digital cameras than any other CE device, though cell phones and MP3 players are growing in popularity.

Especially hot among tweens are cell phones with built-in cameras. "For this age group, perhaps the perfect trifecta of devices is a cell phone with a built-in camera and MP3 player," he says, because these devices appeal to their creative self-expression.

Don't be surprised if your tween soon begs for one. 

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

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# The Tech Generation

Cool Gadgets & The Teens Who Love Them



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**F**orget Generations X and Y. We're done with the alphabet soup segmentation and have moved on to Generation Tech—those tech-savvy teens whose lives are filled with electronic devices. These early adopters pull a lot of weight with manufacturers, retailers and, more importantly, family and friends. While many will spend their own money from allowances and part-time jobs on these devices, they're also likely to put in requests (at various times and with varying degrees of drama) to their parents. When met, it's often in the form of gifts for special occasions such as birthdays, graduations, and holidays.

## Stay Tuned

Music has always been a teenage staple, so it's no surprise that MP3 players were at the top of teens' wish lists this past holiday season. Although he has a portable CD player, 15-year-old Colin Dragon said that he'd like an MP3 player because "they're fun, you can listen to music anywhere, and you don't have to carry around CDs." Well, he got his wish in the form of an iRiver T10 (\$199; [www.iriveramerica.com](http://www.iriveramerica.com)), as well as a gift card to Napster to fill up the MP3 player's 1GB of storage space.

Some teens, such as 16-year-old Moira Rose Barry, already have MP3 players—Moira Rose's is a pink iPod mini, which she received two years ago as a graduation gift and uses "all the time." [Apple discontinued the iPod mini in September 2005, but you can find other iPods starting at \$99; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com).] A field hockey player, Moira Rose

## The Money Tree

Although the final figures weren't available at press time, it looks like teens spent about \$159 billion of their—and your—hard earned dollars in 2005. The money shelled out by teens has actually decreased since 2003, according to TRU (Teen Research Unlimited), a market research company based in Northbrook, Ill., but nearly half of the teens polled say they'll spend more money in 2006.

The good news for parents is that, according to a Dec. 15, 2005, TRU press release, teens reported spending just as much of their own money in 2005 as they did in 2004, so that "... nearly all of the decrease [in spending] seems to stem from less access to other people's money." ●

dresses her iPod in a pink leather case that attaches to her clothing so she can listen to music while she runs for practice; she also tunes in on bus rides to away games.

Although iPods are wildly popular, there are plenty of alternatives such as the iRiver T10 mentioned previously and the Creative Zen Nano Plus (\$109.99 for 512MB/\$139.99 for 1GB; [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)), which is available in 10 fun colors.

## Call Me

Perhaps one of the most essential CE devices for some teens is a cell phone. Although the cool quotient is important—17-year-old R.G. Clancy wants a Motorola RAZR V3 (\$499.99; [www.motorola.com](http://www.motorola.com)) because "that's the coolest phone ever" (and we'd have to agree with him)—that's not what bonds teens to their cell phones.

If forced to choose, says Moira Rose, she would keep her Samsung SCH-A530 cell phone. "Without it I'm lost to the outside world. I always have it because I always need to keep in touch with all my friends." Although she says she's "not too much of a talker," she's on the Verizon Family Plan ([www.verizonwireless.com](http://www.verizonwireless.com)) with plenty of minutes and text messaging. For her next phone, Moira Rose says she'd like one with a camera, although she'd still use her Pentax Optio digital camera (starting around \$200; [www.pentaximaging.com](http://www.pentaximaging.com)) for more important pictures because it delivers better quality images.

Text messaging, like instant messaging, is becoming an increasingly popular form of communication among teens, especially when it's not convenient to talk "live" on the phone. Keeping up with this trend, phones such as the Samsung T309

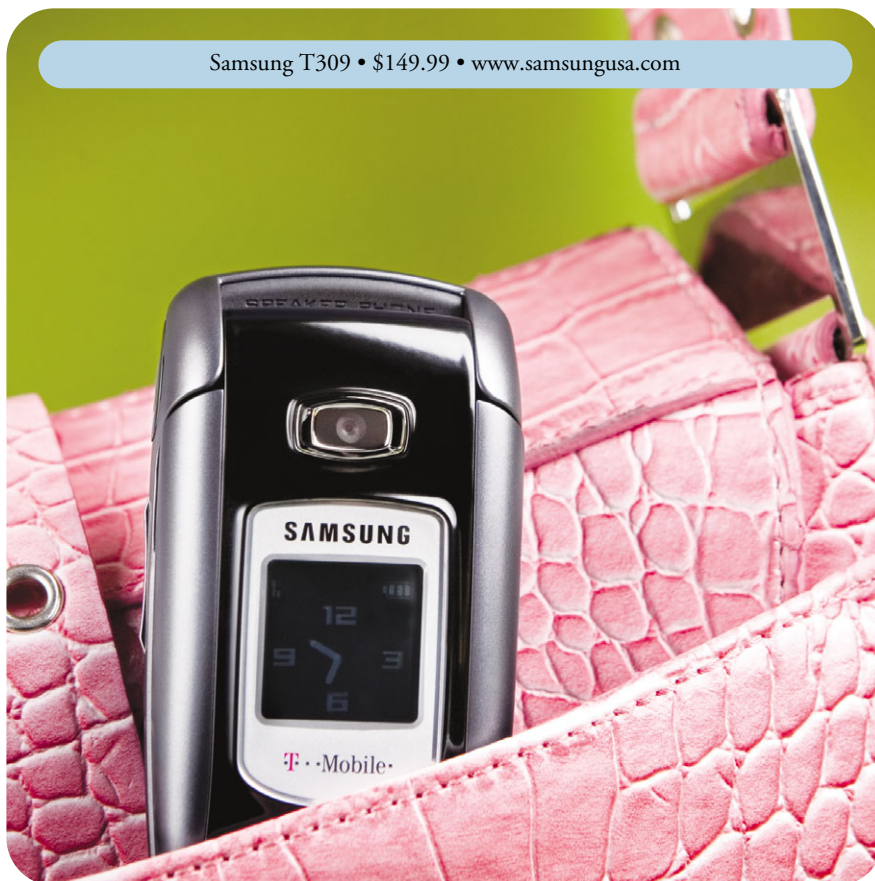
(\$149; [www.samsungusa.com](http://www.samsungusa.com)), are being designed to make text messaging easier.

Many schools have rules about not bringing cell phones into class, but we talked to a few teens who said that classmates will turn off the ringer, hold the phone under the desk, and send text messages back and forth—sort of like the electronic version of passing notes in class. Although that's rarely harmful, schools are becoming more aware that it opens up a whole new avenue of cheating on tests.

## It's (Mostly) A Guy Thing

GenTecher Moira Rose will sometimes play snowboarding or car racing games on the Xbox. You're more likely, though, to find boys sitting at the control of videogame consoles (R.G. Clancy was playing his PS2 during our interview)

Samsung T309 • \$149.99 • [www.samsungusa.com](http://www.samsungusa.com)





In the past couple of years,  
**instant messaging**—a capability  
 that almost all ISPs offer—  
 has become the **communication**  
**method of choice**  
 for many teens.

such as the Xbox 360 (starting at \$299.99; [www.xbox.com](http://www.xbox.com)) or walking around with Sony's PlayStation Portable (\$249.99; [www.psp.com](http://www.psp.com)), says 16-year old Chet Markwalter. "In general, girls don't talk about Xboxes as much as guys. A friend of mine who's a girl has a PlayStation but... she doesn't get into it as much [as the guys]."

Chet chipped in with his brother to buy the original Sony PlayStation, which is in keeping with a December 2004 study conducted by the CEA (Consumer Electronics Association) that indicates teens are more likely to use their own money to buy video-game consoles than other devices. Chet used to play it a lot more often, but he's busier now with homework and after-school activities. Still, though, he manages to play the occasional football game with friends. He does, however, think it would be "cool" to have an Xbox 360, as do many other teens considering how, in December, the device was as scarce as a Cabbage Patch doll was years ago.

## IM Me

It's been almost 10 years since ICQ ([www.icq.com](http://www.icq.com)) came onto the Internet scene, allowing people to connect one-on-one over the Internet. In the past couple of years, instant messaging—a capability that almost all ISPs offer—

has become the communication method of choice for many teens. "It's pretty much replaced the telephone," says 16-year old Emily Harrison who IMs about three hours a day on weekdays and five hours a day on weekends when she's at home. "It's like second air—I breathe, I'm online."

And IM-ing is so pervasive that, she adds, "You pretty much always have someone to talk to." She and her friends talk about school, "whatever's happening, and what you're doing at the moment." They'll also leave "Away" messages, sometimes alerting friends where they're going and to call if they want to join them. Emily's mom, Joan Harrison, says she was talking to a 17-year-old boy who said he and his friend would actually message each other on their laptops even though they were sitting only 6 feet apart.

Only one of the teens we talked to said he had a computer in his room; others use computers in common areas of the house and sometimes share the computer with siblings and/or parents. Although laptops were not at the top of anyone's wish list—either teens we interviewed or those who participated in the CEA's 2005 12th Annual CE Holiday Purchase Patterns Study—there was some frustration at having to wait for a family member to get off the computer so they could do their


## Parents & Internet Safety

As wonderful as the Internet is (and how could we live without it?), there's a dark side that parents need to be aware of. Teaching your kids to be safe on the Internet is not much different than the protective advice you've always given them. As a parent, you need to reinforce the basics such as don't talk to strangers.

It may sound clichéd, but it's critical that you talk with your kids and make sure they stay safe. With blogging so popular on sites such as my-space.com and xanga.com, let your children know that revealing even the most innocent bits of personal information can lead to trouble.

There are many sites on the Internet that will help guide you, but you may want to start with the FBI's A Parent's Guide To Internet Safety: [www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm) ●

homework or log onto the Internet. With laptop prices—even those from Apple (\$999 for an iBook; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com))—dropping, you can pick up a basic but decent unit such as the Dell Inspiron B120 for about \$600 ([www.dell.com](http://www.dell.com)).

A few of the teens we talked to for this article have younger siblings, and it was interesting to hear that even pre-teens are hankering for their own CE devices, especially cell phones. For more information, see "CE & The Tween Years" on page 46.) With the incredible awareness that kids and teens have about consumer electronics, we as adults may find ourselves asking for their CE recommendations from now on. 

BY THEANO NIKITAS



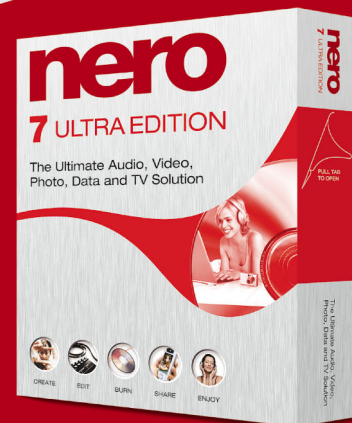
# Multitasking At Its Best



## The digital media software that does it all!

**Announcing Nero 7 Ultra Edition** – The Ultimate Audio, Video, Photo, Data and TV Solution which meets all of your digital media needs, now enables you to easily take control of your home entertainment experience.

Whether you want to create audio playlists of your MP3s or entertaining slide-shows of your photos, edit your home videos, burn a backup of your DVDs\*, convert your audio & video into state-of-the-art MPEG-4 (Nero Digital™) files, share your content on your consumer electronic devices or manage your media files with a click of your remote control, Nero 7 Ultra Edition is truly the only partner you need for today's digital home.



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**COMPUSA**  
WHERE AMERICA BUYS TECHNOLOGY



**Office  
DEPOT**

**amazon.com**

\* Does not copy DVD with copy protection





# Editor's Top 10

## Reasons I Love These Devices

*CE Lifestyles* editor Katie Sommer loves to tech out her young nieces and nephews with CE gear so cool they won't want to grow up. Here's why.

**1** Who doesn't like a dance party with little kids? It's easy to create a playlist on your PC or burn a CD mix of favorite fun songs.

**2** Visits to Grandma's are much more fun and relaxing with a portable DVD player in the car.

**3** It's never too early to introduce children to public broadcasting—try PBSKids.org for good educational online games and printable coloring sheets.

**4** A cell phone will help keep your teenage daughter safe when she's with her friends, and you know she'll always have it on her because it makes her feel cool.


**5** Children and digital cameras can lead to some interesting, sweet, and touching photos from their unique perspectives.

**6** An MP3 player or a cell phone can teach tweens important lessons on accountability and responsibility.

**7** In moderation, some CE products, such as Vtech's V.Smile (\$59.99; [www.vtech.com](http://www.vtech.com)), can help toddlers with basic educational building blocks, such as reading and math.

**8** If you have digital photos, glue, a few pieces of paper, some string, and a pair of scissors, you have endless art project ideas for kids of all ages.

**9** Some CE products, such as video monitoring systems, can give the parents of babies some much-needed peace of mind during naps and bedtime.

**10** A big-screen TV can bring your entire family (even your teenagers) together for a fun night of popcorn, soda, and "Madagascar." 

# Tips: Keep It In One Piece

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

## Start Early

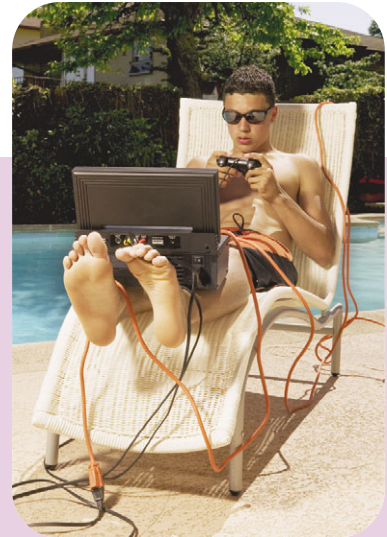
It's never too soon to introduce your child to electronic toys that incorporate technology. Toys such as LeapFrog's LeapPad (starting at \$20; [www.leapfrog.com](http://www.leapfrog.com)) not only help your child with learning the alphabet, colors, numbers, and more, but they also have many characteristics common to electronic devices. For example, a LeapPad-style toy can help your son or daughter learn such basics as adjusting volume levels, using a stylus-like pointer, finding icons, using keyboard-like input, and activating various features on command. In addition, these toys often have books or cartridges a child can swap out, similar to swapping out memory cards or batteries on an electronic device.

## Hands On & Hands Off

Your kids need adult supervision, and there's nothing wrong with making this point clear—especially when it comes to them using your new \$2,000 flat-panel TV. Where your electronics are concerned, set clear guidelines for what your children can and can't use without your supervision. Depending on their ages, follow this up with age-appropriate instructions for properly using that TV. For example, walk your grade-schooler through turning on the TV and DVD player and popping in her favorite "Blue's Clues" or "Dora the Explorer" DVD. Then let her try it herself a few times while you're watching, correcting her when needed. When she's ready, let her have a go at it alone with you out of the room. If you hear Blue giggling, your daughter has the basics down.

## Let Them Play

You want your kids to be tech-savvy, right? Fortunately, children are inherently curious. Unfortunately, their way of learning often means tearing something apart, seeing what's inside, and trying to put it together again. This doesn't bode well for your \$400 digital camcorder or its warranty. So, provide your kids a diversion away from your electronics by giving them their own. For example, for about \$80 the Mattel Vidster Digital Camcorder ([www.mattel.com](http://www.mattel.com)) lets your budding Sofia Coppola make six- to eight-minute movies via 32MB of memory. Made of hard plastic, the camera connects to a PC via a USB port and has a SD card slot to add more memory, which means more cinematic magic.



## Fear Not The Teen Years

You're familiar with "digital divide," right? Well, it probably exists between you and your teen, just not in the direction you think. Many physicians and researchers argue that children pick up new skills faster and easier than adults. Spend enough time with a teen, and it shows. Kids today start using computers at school from Day 1. Beyond word processing, they're learning to program, create Web sites, design yearbooks and school newspapers, and use hardware and often sophisticated software. Email and instant messaging is the teenager's new phone, and iPods and portable music players are the new Walkman. That's not to mention the cell phones they incessantly talk/IM on and know how to customize and program backward and forward. Today's kids don't remember a time without technology. They're comfortable using it, so feel comfortable letting them.



# Digital Photo Project

## Photo Puzzle




### SUPPLIES:

- Photos (you'll need quite a few—we used around 20)
- White poster board
- Decoupage
- Sponge brush
- Pencil
- Scissors



### TIPS:

- \* Sew a simple drawstring bag out of some colorful calico and store the puzzle pieces in that.
- \* If your child is very young, use wallet-sized prints and an 8-1/2 x 11-inch piece of cardstock to make a smaller puzzle perfect for little hands.

- \* Need a late-winter craft project for kids with cabin fever? Send them off with a digital camera (make sure they know how to properly use it) and have them take a few dozen photos of their home, room, pets, yard, and anything else they can think of. Then, use your home photo printer to print their favorites, so they can make the puzzle. This will keep them occupied for hours, and you don't have to leave your cozy house. 

**B**ecause our cover story is all about kids and technology, we thought we'd cover a digital photo project that was so easy that even children could do it. This month's project is a photo puzzle, which is a fun way of getting creative with lots of pictures at once.

### DIRECTIONS:

With the sponge brush and decoupage, glue each photo, one by one, onto the poster board. The placement doesn't have to be perfect but make sure you completely coat the back of the photo for proper adhesion.

When you've pasted all the photos on to the poster board, spread another layer of decoupage over the entire surface. Let it dry and repeat with one more layer of decoupage.

Make sure it's completely dry and then use the pencil to draw puzzle pieces on the back side of the poster board. There's no science to this—depending on who you're making the puzzle for, the shapes can be very basic or very complicated.

With adult supervision, of course, cut out the shapes.

Have fun with it! This photo puzzle is a great activity for kids, and it makes a nice keepsake, too.

BY KATIE SOMMER



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Is your camera equipment begging for an upgrade? Take a look at these two setups: one for a professional's budget and one for a budding photographer.

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

# SPLURGE

MEMORY CARD

## SanDisk Extreme III CompactFlash 4GB

SanDisk • [www.sandisk.com](http://www.sandisk.com) • \$599.99

Scads of space for all of your high-resolution images along with the write speeds necessary to keep you shooting



EXTERNAL FLASH



## Nikon SB-800 Speedlight i-TTL Shoe Mount Flash

Nikon • [www.nikonimaging.com](http://www.nikonimaging.com) • \$321.35\*\*

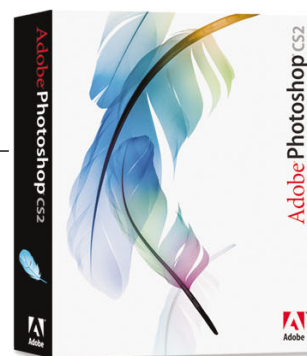
A flash with all the bells and whistles; because lighting is everything

SOFTWARE

## Adobe Photoshop CS2

Adobe • [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com) • \$649

With all of its features, it's no wonder the pros use Photoshop CS2

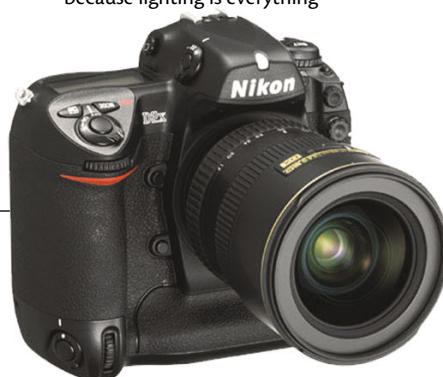


CAMERA

## Nikon D2X with Nikon Nikkor 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6G ED AF-S DX zoom lens

Nikon • [www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com) • \$4,955.16\*\*

Compete with the pros using this 12.4MP professional-grade camera



PRINTER

## Epson Stylus Photo R2400

Epson • [www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com) • \$849.99

Epson's amazing print quality and speed at up to 44 x 13 inches (HxW) for all of your printing projects



CASE

## Billingham 225 Camera Bag

Billingham • [www.billingham.co.uk](http://www.billingham.co.uk) • \$338.96\*\*

Carry your camera and equipment everywhere life takes you with this high quality bag that doesn't scream "camera equipment on board"



TRIPOD



## Gitzo Carbon 6X G1157

Gitzo • [www.bogenimaging.us](http://www.bogenimaging.us) • \$487.62\*\*

This lightweight tripod won't break your back, but it will put a dent in your bank account

**High-End Price: \$8,322.11**

\* Some of the cameras and equipment come in other colors, as well.

\*\* If not marked with asterisks (\*\*), price is the manufacturer's suggested retail price. If marked with asterisks, price is an average of several online retailers' prices.

# & STEAL

Take Great Pictures On Any Budget

MEMORY CARD

## Kingston CompactFlash Elite Pro 2GB

Kingston • [www.kingston.com](http://www.kingston.com) • \$133.26\*\*

Take plenty of precious pictures with this 2GB card



EXTERNAL FLASH



## Sigma EF500 DG ST

Sigma • [www.sigmaphoto.com](http://www.sigmaphoto.com) • \$199

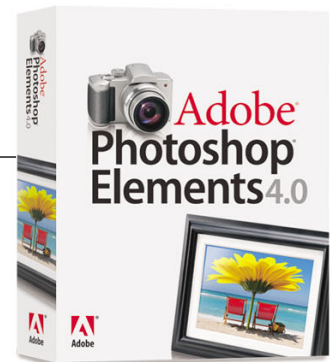
Ensure quality pictures in a variety of lighting conditions with this budget flash

SOFTWARE

## Adobe Photoshop Elements 4.0

Adobe • [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com) • \$99.99

A simple and easy-to-use editing program with manual and automatic controls



CAMERA

## Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT with Canon EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 zoom lens

Canon • [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com) • \$918.84\*\*

All of the manual controls you need plus a few extras—including a price that won't break the bank



PRINTER

## Canon PIXMA iP4200

Canon • [www.consumer.usa.canon.com](http://www.consumer.usa.canon.com) • \$129.99

Print your pictures at home using this high-speed, photo-quality printer



CASE

## Tamrac Zoom Traveler 3

Tamrac • [www.tamrac.com](http://www.tamrac.com) • \$84.04\*\*

An affordable bag with handy compartments for extra batteries and digital memory



TRIPOD



## SLIK PRO 330 DX

SLIK • [www.slik.com](http://www.slik.com) • \$99.66\*\*

Easy setup with quick release leg locks to get you set up and shooting in no time

**Budget Price: \$1,664.78**



# Our Favorite Photo-Sharing Sites

## Share Photos & Much More

**W**hen looking through those holiday snapshots, you might want to share some with friends and family. But the Internet is a jungle; there is an overwhelming number of photo-sharing sites to choose from. We'll help you decide which site is best for you and your photo-sharing project.

### What Do You Want To Do?

It's a good idea to evaluate what you want to accomplish with

### If You Want To . . .

We've divided what most people want to do with a photo-sharing site into four categories: make prints, share files, link to another site, or archive. Based on these preferences, here are the sites to check out and those to avoid.

**Make prints 'til your heart's content.** If you love prints of your photos, look for a photo-sharing site that offers discounts based on the number of prints you buy from your shared pictures. For example, with Shutterfly ([www.shutterfly.com](http://www.shutterfly.com)), you'll receive a 2-cent discount on each print if you buy more than 100. (The price goes from 19 cents each to 17 cents each.) The site is easy to use, as well. To order prints simply click Order Prints next to the image you want. Sharing your gallery with others is easy, too; just type your recipient's email address on the Share Pictures page on the Share online tab at the top of each page, and she will get an email with a link to your photos. And with no gallery limits, you can upload as many files as you want.

Snapfish ([www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)) also offers inexpensive prints—only 12 cents each (plus shipping), and if you prepay for 1,000, the price drops to 10 cents each. If you want to take advantage of the convenient Walgreens pickup option, the cost is 19 cents—but it might be worth the extra charge because you'll get your pictures in a few hours instead of several days.

**Keep an online photo archive.** Maybe you don't care about sharing images with others or ordering prints right now. Another need these photo-sharing sites can fulfill is the ability to archive. It would be devastating, almost catastrophic, if something happened to your computer and you lost all your data, including your digital photos. Let a free photo-sharing site serve as a back-up storage for your digital albums. Shutterbook ([www.shutterbook.com](http://www.shutterbook.com)) is a new service that launched in December of last year. Like Picasa, Shutterbook does not offer any print services, but the gallery and sharing aspects of the site are unlike any others. The Macromedia Flash design makes it easy and fun to play a gallery as a slideshow with music and hi-res photos. Shutterbook offers a free basic account, but for \$49 per year, users can have a customizable gallery that you can password-protect, as well as add music to your slideshows and store hi-res photos with 20GB of storage space. Basic free accounts are limited to 200 pictures.

Yahoo! Photos ([photos.yahoo.com](http://photos.yahoo.com)) is a basic site that's perfect for archiving. (Those who don't have a Yahoo! account will have to create one to use Yahoo! Photos.) Jessie Anderson, a spokesperson for Yahoo! Photos, says, "Yahoo! Photos users see photography as primarily a means of memory preservation." With Yahoo! Photos, you get unlimited storage, but you need to log in to your account at least once every six months.

your photo-sharing site before you start one. Do you want to order prints? Do you want an online gallery to share with friends and family? Do you want a service to host your pictures for your blog or personal Web site? Deciding what you want to do will help narrow the choices.



**Show Mom pics of the kids.** If you want to make it easy on your mom to see your photos, use a service that doesn't require any registration or extra steps from the recipient. Kodak's EasyShare Gallery ([www.kodakgallery.com](http://www.kodakgallery.com)) lets you enter email addresses for those you wish to share your photos with. You can also enter a personalized message and choose whether to require recipients to sign in to view your pics. If you don't require them to sign in, then anyone can view your pictures, but it makes it easier on Mom to see them if she doesn't have an account with Kodak. If she does have an account, she can sign in and easily return to your gallery later because it will appear under her My Friends' Albums list.



If sharing your photos with friends and family is important, Snapfish might be one service to avoid because it requires viewers to sign in or create an account to see your pictures. Snapfish does, however, offer some unique gifts that can be customized with a picture from your gallery (see "The Extras" sidebar at the end of this article), and it offers inexpensive prints, as we mentioned above.

PhotoSite ([www.photosite.com](http://www.photosite.com)) gives you an easy gallery address to remember and share. After you set up an account, you can create a unique URL, something like *yourgallery.photosite.com* (where *yourgallery* is a gallery name of your choice). There's no need to send an invitation email to friends and family because they can easily find your pictures with your customized address whenever they want, just by remembering the URL. Instead of a Web-based interface like many sites, PhotoSite uses AlbumBuilder, a program that you

download and install on your own PC. It is a dynamic program that lets you completely customize your gallery, and you can also do minor photo edits such as correcting red eye and changing the brightness and contrast. One of our gripes is that every time the program is launched, a pop-up appears asking you to upgrade to one of the three premium services (\$1.99, \$2.99, or \$4.99 per month, depending on number of photos to be shared and personalized URL) to upload more pictures and get customized gallery layouts.

Shutterfly also offers a dedicated, unique URL. Just like with PhotoSite, you can choose something like *yourgallery.shutterfly.com* (where *yourgallery* is a gallery name of your choice). Shutterfly might be more attractive because there's no software to download and install and it is a little easier to navigate—with no annoying upgrade pop-ups.


#### Add pictures to your blog or other site.

Sure, most blogging sites allow you to add photos, but if you want to have galleries and galleries of photos in one organized place, use a photo-sharing site that allows image hosting. If you use Google's Blogger, Google's Picasa ([www.picasa.com](http://www.picasa.com)) is the obvious photo-sharing program for you. Picasa integrates with Blogger to let you easily add photos to your blog. It also has simple editing functionality in the Basic Fixes toolset. One of Picasa's coolest features is the ability to create a screensaver, movie, or slideshow from your pictures.

Flickr ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)) by Yahoo!, and in its beta stage at press time, allows users to upload photos via email, arrange and create sets of photos with Organizr, and send photos directly to a blog. It supports many popular blog services including Blogger, LiveJournal ([www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com)), Typepad ([www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com)), and more.

If you're an eBay seller, you know how important photos (and lots of them) are to your buyers. smugmug ([www.smugmug.com](http://www.smugmug.com)) is perfect for you: It's a paid service in which basic users can have an unlimited number of photos (up to 8MB each). (A basic membership costs \$29.95 a year.) In addition to linking to eBay listings, you can link images to blogs, your own Web site, and other external sites—a photo-hosting service that many free sites don't allow.

### Make The Decision

Wading through all the different options can be frustrating and challenging. But keeping in mind the intended purpose and audience can help narrow the choices, and with our suggestions, you're sure to find a photo-sharing site perfect for you and your photography habits. 

BY BRIAN WEED



## The Extras

**M**ost photo-sharing sites offer merchandise that you can customize with a favorite photo. Sure, customized mouse pads, shirts, and coffee mugs are everywhere, but some services we looked at have cool and unique items. Here are our favorites:

At smugmug ([www.smugsmug.com](http://www.smugsmug.com)), you can create a photo puzzle (\$19.95), which is a wonderful birthday gift idea for a child.

Photo coasters (\$19.95) from PhotoSite ([www.photosite.com](http://www.photosite.com)) can make a great conversation piece at your next coffee-table gathering.

Send your kids to summer camp with photo pillowcases (\$19.99) from Snapfish ([www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)). They'll be sure to sleep tight.



A photo clock (\$49.99) from Snapfish ([www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)) makes a fun gift for the home office or kids' room.

A photo cutting board (\$24.99) from Snapfish ([www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)) is a great gift idea for your budding chef of a sister. Now you can make her cry even when she's not chopping onions.

Send your parents a PhotoShow DVD (\$19.99) from Shutterfly ([www.shutterfly.com](http://www.shutterfly.com)). It's an especially useful gift if your folks don't have a computer or would rather watch a slideshow on their TV.

## The Bottom Line

**M**any services offer competitive prices and features, but we cut to the chase and compared prices, features, and usability.

Service	4 x 6 Print Price	Features	Overall Usability
Snapfish	12 cents	Pick up at Walgreens for 19 cents	Easy to use and plenty of options for printing services at the lowest price we found
Kodak Gallery	15 cents	Get in the mail or pick up at a CVS pharmacy	Integrates with Kodak's EasyShare software, giving Kodak digicam users unparalleled convenience
Flickr	15 cents	Pick up at Target for 20 cents	Great for the pro or aspiring pro; photography clubs and groups could benefit from the service's robust features
Yahoo! Photos	15 cents	Pick up at Target for 20 cents	A simple and straightforward photo-sharing and photo-printing service
Shutterfly	19 cents	15 free 4 x 6 prints for new users	Great free photo-sharing service that is easy to use and makes it easy for recipients to see your photos
smugmug	25 cents	Annual charge of \$29.95	The annual charge is minimal when compared with the services offered; pro photographers can share and sell prints of their best works with their own domain
PhotoSite	29 cents	AlbumBuilder software is robust but may take some setup time	The proprietary software is a bit cumbersome, but for the tech-savvy user, it will provide plenty of features to fill a gallery with sharp photos



## Cool accessories.

Audiovox is always close to her heart. She loves her Audiovox MP3 Player with FM tuner. Her well-rounded DVD Player with built-in video games. And the big, blue display of her XM Satellite Radio with FM modulator is always nearby. Accessorize your life with Audiovox. Go to [www.audiovox.com](http://www.audiovox.com) or call 1-800-645-4994.



MP3 Player



DVD Player



**AUDIOVOX®**



# Know How

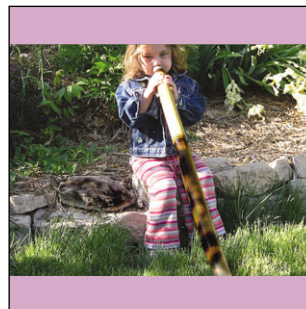
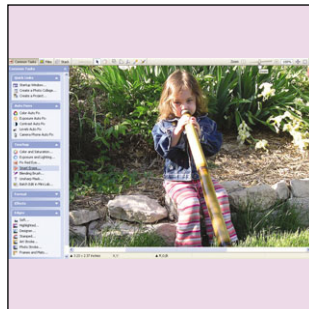
## One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

**P**hoto editors have many tools that are unique to the digital realm. Some, however, are carryovers from the darkroom and working with negatives and photo paper. Two such tools are burning and dodging. Although editors have simple controls for adjusting the lightness or darkness of an entire image, with burning and dodging, you can pinpoint these adjustments at specific areas, usually to bring out more detail. In the darkroom, burning means increasing the light exposure on part of a print to darken it. Dodging is just the opposite—blocking light from the print to lighten part of the image. Their digital equivalents work on finished photos but deliver similar results.

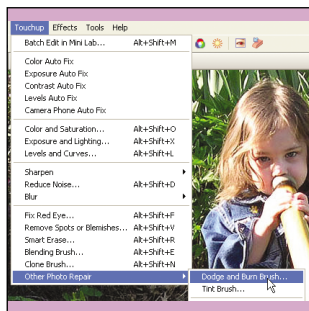
### Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

1 Set the Zoom level, so you can easily target the desired area. 100% is a good place to start.



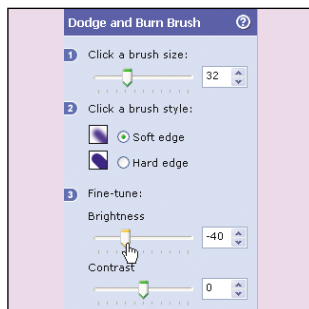
To burn, drag the Brightness slider below zero, into negative values. Then click and drag your brush in the pertinent part of the photo. Here we've deepened the tones along the lower part of the bamboo didgeridoo and darkened the rock to the girl's left.

2 Open the Touchup menu, choose Other Photo Repair, and click Dodge And Burn Brush.



To dodge, set the Brightness slider to a positive value and then click and drag your brush. Here we've lightened our little tribal musician's face to bring it out of the shadows a bit. For burning and dodging alike, the effect is cumulative—it builds up with each pass of your brush.

3 In the activity panel, set your Brush Size to roughly correspond to the area you want to treat. For the Brush Style, a soft edge will blend more smoothly; a hard edge will create more abrupt transitions.

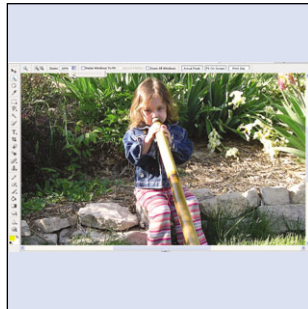


There's not much you can do to treat a white, overexposed area like the upper end of the bamboo. The area has to have color and shading before you can alter them. (We've ignored the Contrast slider here, which is a separate tool that essentially burns and dodges at the same time.)

## Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

1

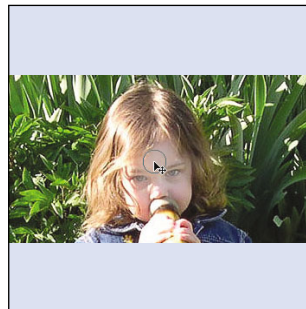
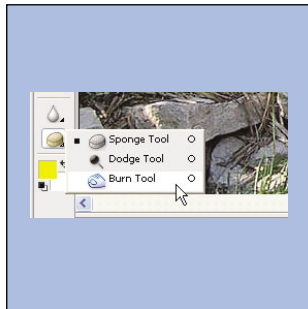
Open your photo in Standard Edit view and adjust the Zoom setting, so the image is at a workable size.



Click and drag the brush to paint over the target area. As we did before, we've used Burn to deepen the bamboo and darken the rock.

2

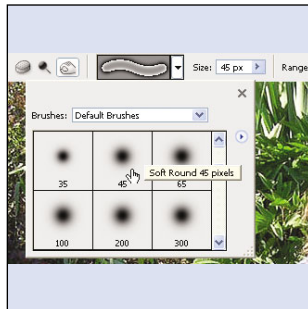
The Burn and Dodge tools (along with the Sponge tool) are located near the bottom of the left toolbar. Click and hold the button and select the one you need from the pop-up menu.



Now we've used Dodge to lighten the girl's face. For finer control, use a low Exposure setting and go over the area several times. Don't hesitate to change brush sizes for more detailed work.

3

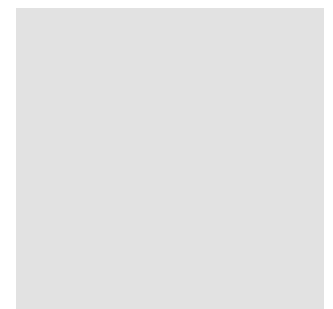
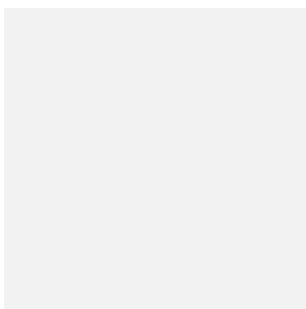
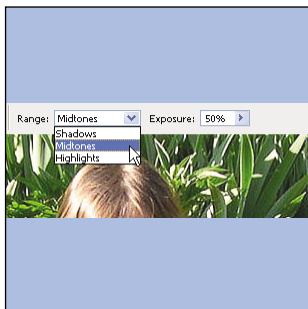
Fine-tune your settings in the Tool Options bar. Click the Brushes arrow and select a style from the drop-down panel. For most applications, a soft round brush of a suitable size will do the best job.



As long as you're in the neighborhood, try the Sponge tool, which works the same way but for saturating and desaturating color.

4

You may need to reset Range from its default. The Midtones setting confines the effect to the central range of brightness. Shadows and Highlights affect dark and light areas. Finally, set Exposure if needed; the higher the value, the more pronounced each brush stroke will be.

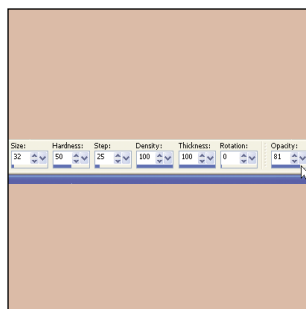
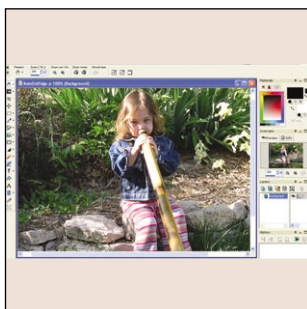




## Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

1

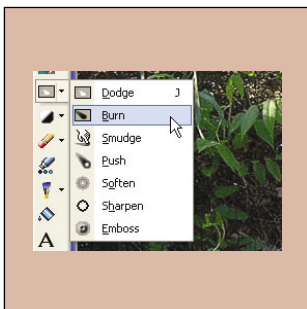
Open your photo and adjust Zoom, so the image is a comfortable size to work with.



Adjust the other settings as needed. The ones you mainly need to be concerned with are Brush Size, Hardness (which determines how softly the brush edge blends), and Opacity (which is the equivalent of Photoshop Elements' Exposure setting).

2

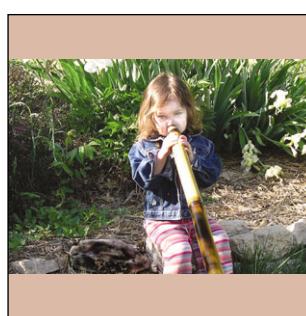
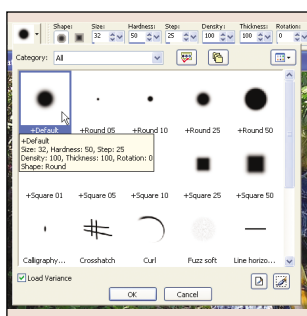
The Burn and Dodge tools are located in the middle of the left toolbar. Click and hold the button and select the one you need from the pop-up menu.



Click and drag the brush to paint over the target feature. Again, we've hit the bamboo and rock with Burn.

3

Choose a brush from the drop-down panel. Round will usually work best, unless you're specifically going after a square-edged area.



Finally, we've lightened our girl's face with Dodge. You can quickly toggle between burning and dodging with your mouse's right button. If you've selected Burn, right-clicking and dragging applies Dodge and vice versa.

# Three wonders every digital camera owner should experience



## KanguruMedia X-change

Get up to 80GB of digital photo storage built for the road. When you've filled your media cards but don't have access to a computer, the Media X-change is the perfect solution! Copy your photos right to this mini hard drive with the push of a button!

### Features:

- Works with CF, SD, MMC, Memory Stick, and Microdrive
- Built-in Card Reader
- High Speed USB 2.0
- Portable design & custom carry case
- Driverless on most OS

## Kanguru Slim FC-RW

Never run out of storage! The Kanguru Slim FC-RW can provide portable backup or archival abilities for your flash cards while on the road! Burn your pictures directly from your flash card to a CD without a computer!

### Features:

- Works with CF, SD, MMC, Memory Stick, and Microdrive
- Backup cards over 1GB
- Play DVDs or view pics on your TV
- Connect to your PC via USB 2.0
- Burn CDs, Play DVDS, View Pictures
- Rechargeable battery

## KanguruQuickSilver Hard Drives

Run out of room for your photos on your computer? Store them on this sleek, high quality external HD. Excellent performance that looks great on your desktop too!

### Features:

- Up to 400GB of storage
- Store thousands of digital photos
- High Performance 7200RPM Drives
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- Alloy design dissipates heat
- Withstands up to 200G of shock
- Vibrant Blue Kanguru LED
- Stands vertical or lays flat

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Call: 888.KANGURU



[www.pcconnection.com](http://www.pcconnection.com)  
Call: 800.800.5555

Photo courtesy of Omar Attum Photography and stored on a Kanguru Media X-change.  
"Insert the memory card into the Media X-change, push copy, and the photographs are downloaded. I then transfer the photographs from the Media X-change to my laptop... It's that simple!" - Omar Attum



## tips Spring Photography

# 1

### Take A Field Trip

No animals symbolize spring more than lambs and rabbits. If you have access to a petting zoo or a kid-friendly farm, round up some children and your camera, and make a day of it. It will be educational for the children, and the pictures will likely be delightful.

# 2

### Spring Is For The Birds

Springtime photography doesn't have to revolve exclusively around flowers and plants. Many bird species are most colorful in the spring, when they break out their breeding plumage. They'll obviously be more difficult to capture than unmoving flora, but a couple tricks will help improve your odds. Set up one or more bird feeders in a location you can easily cover with your camera, without many background obstructions. If you have an SLR, invest in a telephoto lens compatible with your camera's body and electronics. A 200mm or longer lens will put you close to the birds without disturbing them.

# 3

### Shoot A Growth Series

We hope you were thinking ahead and planted some flower bulbs last fall. From the time they first sprout through the ground, shoot a picture of them every few days. After they've grown, flourished, and matured, select five shots that best represent various stages of life. Have them printed and then frame and hang them in order for a beautiful original series of prints. Or have them matted together in a row and placed in a single long frame as a self-contained exhibit.

# 4

### Blur Your Backgrounds

Springtime brings a wonderful riot of growth, so when shooting foliage, you'll want to keep your picture's focal point confined to your subject rather than lose it against a busy background. The way you frame your shot makes a difference, of course, but your best ally is a short depth of field (the area of a photo that's in acceptably sharp focus). This blurs the background, so the subject stands out more clearly and is achieved by using a wide aperture setting (numerically low f-stop number). To assist you, most digital cameras have macro or close-up presets, often designated on the mode dial with a flower. If you have a choice of cameras, SLRs usually deliver better short depth of field results than compacts.

# 5

### Make A Time-Lapse Film

For an even more ambitious project, shoot a photo of your flowers every day and be sure to keep them in order. After they've gone from sprout to full bloom, use your computer to sequence the shots into a time-lapse film showing their complete growth. You can do this either in movie software, such as Microsoft Windows XP's built-in Movie Maker 2, or a slideshow program, such as Easy Media Creator 8 (\$99.95; [www.roxio.com](http://www.roxio.com)), using the program's quickest display times and dissolve between each slide. Your main concern will be consistently shooting the plants from as close to the same perspective as possible. Use a tripod and mark the optimal location for its feet with small stones or pegs driven into the soil.



BY BRIAN HODGE



# AVOX | Jukebox

Portable Media

Home Theatre

*make your media as mobile as you are*

## A Portable Media Player

The AVOX Jukebox is the easiest way to turn your 2.5" hard drive into a portable audio/video player.

With a simple to use ON SCREEN DISPLAY, the AVOX Jukebox can play movies, music, or a slideshow of your pictures when connected to the AV inputs on any television. Since it also doubles as a portable enclosure, you can store your documents, programs, or any other data on the AVOX Jukebox as well. With the built-in high speed USB 2.0 interface, files can be transfer up to 40 times faster than USB 1.1. Easy to use, sleek, and compact, the AVOX Jukebox is the perfect way to make your media as mobile as you are.

# MOVIE MUSIC PHOTO STORAGE



### where to buy



9.5 / 10



For more information, please go to  
<http://www.vantecusa.com>

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# Gift Of The Month

## 3D Home Architect Landscape & Patio Design



S

pring will be here before we know it and with it comes the time for all things green. Although our moms always told us not to plant our flowers before Mother's Day, now is the perfect time to start planning for the big day. If you know a gardener (or even someone who wishes she was), March's Gift Of The

Month will help her turn her landscaping dreams into reality. Every month we feature a gift that you can pick up for less than \$50 and is sure to please someone in your life. For March we've selected 3D Home Architect: Landscape & Patio Design (\$19.99; [www.encoresoftware.com](http://www.encoresoftware.com)), a software package that will come in handy when the sun comes back out to play.

### Use Your Green Thumb


We have people in our lives who manage to do quite an impressive job planting every year, despite not having a

lot of knowledge about what they're doing. They are somehow able to fumble their way through it with beautiful results. We, on the other hand, have not been so fortunate in past years.

One of the reasons we like the idea of giving 3D Home Architect: Landscape & Patio Design so much is that whether you give it to someone who has a beautiful garden every year or someone whose green thumb is a little brown, she can benefit from it.

Landscape & Patio Design can help you figure out how to make the most of your yard, whatever the situation. Using 2D and 3D views, the gardener (or gardener wannabe) in your life will be able to design a yard while choosing from more than 7,500 plants in the included encyclopedia. The program also has complete instructions on watering and caring for the selected plants and even a calendar of when to plant, depending on your growing region.

If making a so-so yard into a flower-filled feast for the eyes isn't enough, you can use the patio design portion of the software to create an outdoor addition to complete your yard. You can also add elements such as driveways, pathways, retaining walls, ponds, and lighting to finish off your look.

As the old saying goes, if March comes in like a lion, it goes out like a lamb. But now instead of having to just sit and wait for the lamb's arrival, gardeners of any skill level can begin preparing for this year's outdoor makeover while the lion is still lurking. And they'll have you, in part, to thank for their bountiful success. 

BY JOY MARTIN



On such a nice day,  
don't you want to go outside and play?



Boston Acoustics Voyager® Speakers and Subwoofers —  
designed to bring The Boston Sound™ to the great outdoors.

[www.BostonAcoustics.com](http://www.BostonAcoustics.com)

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# Be Prepared For Disaster

## Protect Your Data From Catastrophe



320GB Dual Option Media Center  
\$279.99  
[www.westerndigital.com](http://www.westerndigital.com)

**L**eitha Gallicio's Metairie, La., home has weathered hurricanes and floods before, and the 3-foot piers that lift it off the ground have always kept her computer out of harm's way, so she didn't pack the PC when she left ahead of last year's Hurricane Katrina. "We've been dodging the bullet for years," Gallicio says.

Gallicio, a draftsman who uses her computer to create custom maps for local businesses, stored many of her files on the system that sat on top of her desk. When she returned, she discovered that water had submerged the PC's most important component—the hard drive. "The water stayed for two weeks," says Gallicio.

If Gallicio's experience sends a chill down your spine, you probably don't have copies of your most important files stored in a disaster-proof place. We'll help you plan a backup system that will keep your data safe when you don't dodge the bullet.

### Prepare For The Worst

In some cases, we receive advance notice of impending disasters. In those situations, people who have already created data backup systems can grab their backups before heading towards safety. But many catastrophes don't

## Destroy Your Data

**T**hough it seems counter-intuitive, in some situations, you may need to protect some data by destroying it. If you decide to move from one external hard drive to a larger drive and want to sell the older device, you'll need to permanently remove every trace of

your personal documents. You'll foil casual snoops by deleting a file (right-click the file and then click Delete); it's merely a speed bump to serious data thieves. To make sure your data won't see the light of day, invest in data deletion software that meets U.S. Department Of

Defense standards. Make sure that the software will permanently delete all data on the drive: Some programs only delete individual files. Programs such as CyberScrub's cyberCide 2.5 ([www.cyberscrub.com](http://www.cyberscrub.com)) completely wipe your hard drive. ●

## Protect Your Records

**M**any of our most important documents aren't on our hard drives—they're in our filing cabinets. If you keep deeds, social security cards, or other important documents at home, scan them into

digital format and then back them up with your other digital valuables. Many scanners can import your documents to Adobe's PDF format, which preserves the file. (It doesn't add formatting or otherwise

change the document.) You can open PDF documents with any computer that has Adobe's free Acrobat Reader software, which makes PDF a great format for backing up important data. ●

offer much warning. A lightning strike near your home may cause a power surge that can fry your computer. Earthquakes and tornados often strike without any warning at all. Fire is another threat—rescuing the PC or hunting for that external hard drive is the last thing on your mind when you wake up to find the house ablaze.

What makes the perfect backup system depends largely on the quantity and value of your files. If your data is critical to your or your business' financial well-being, you should view backup hardware as only the first layer of protection.

Hardware backups are handy—and also vulnerable. They can often store huge

quantities of data (your music, photo, and video collections, for example). And they let you retrieve the backed up information quickly. If a PC's hard drive fails (taking your documents with it), you can replace the drive, reinstall the operating system, and then plug in your USB flash drive to transfer backed-up files to your computer. However, the disaster that wipes out your PC may well destroy your backup device.

Online backup services are sometimes inconvenient and can be costly (Quicken Online Backup Service has plans that range from \$8.95 per month to \$24.95 per month), but storing your files on these remote servers almost guarantees that your data will survive whatever problems you encounter.

You'll want to add this second layer of protection for your most precious files.

## Backup Hardware

The days of carrying dozens of floppies are long gone. External hard drives, flash memory keys, and CDs make great portable storage for everyday use and for backing up important data.

External hard drives, such as Western Digital's 320GB Dual Option Media Center WDXF3200JB (\$279.99; [www.westerndigital.com](http://www.westerndigital.com)), make excellent backup devices and are fairly portable. Heavy-duty drives often plug into your power strip and transfer data via a USB cable, but you can detach the cords and toss the drive into a bag at a moment's notice. You can also plug the drive into other PCs (to retrieve your data) when you reach safety.

If you want to back up multiple files regularly, look for a hard drive that includes backup software. The program, which installs on your computer, can pull files out of several different folders and copy them to your external drive, which means you won't need to poke around your folder system every time you want to back up. These programs also let users specify backup schedules: You can configure the software to back up your data every night or once a week.

Plan to back up only individual files—some backup software can copy your entire system to an external drive, but you may have trouble transferring the data to a new system (unless the PC's motherboard can boot from a USB device).

Flash drives, also known as USB keys, are the tiny devices that drove floppy disks into obsolescence. A flash drive, which plugs into your computer's USB port, doesn't require a separate power source. It can't hold as much data as a hard drive (high-end drives store about 4GB, while inexpensive drives that store only





1GB Data Traveler Elite  
\$110  
[www.kingston.com](http://www.kingston.com)

256MB are available for less than \$20), but if you want to keep important documents in your pocket, you're looking for a flash drive. We especially like the 1GB Kingston Data Traveler Elite (\$110; [www.kingston.com](http://www.kingston.com)).

If you want to make sure you don't leave your drive behind, you can attach it to your key chain. Keep in mind that you can easily lose such small devices—if you plan to store images of birth certificates, social security cards, or other personal info, buy a drive that can encrypt its contents. If you live in a flood-prone area, protect your devices with a water-proof box, such as OtterBox' 3500 (\$28.49; [www.otterbox.com](http://www.otterbox.com)).

If you need to back up your data right away, grab your MP3 player or PDA. These portable devices can double as portable hard drives in a pinch.

## Backup Services

Online data protection services let subscribers upload copies of their files to servers. If you have a broadband

connection, the service can automatically retrieve the files you specify on a schedule, just as with regular backup software. You can also take advantage of a backup service over a dial-up connection, but keep in mind that dialup connections are notoriously slow. If you want to upload more than a few megabytes every day, consider upgrading to broadband.

Skip digital music, photos, and videos when you select the files that you plan to store remotely, as they'll quickly eat up your subscription's space allotment. Instead, focus on documents, as well as data files for important programs, such as your financial software. If you back up your financial program's data files before a disaster destroys your computer, you can install the program onto a new computer and then load your data files. Although Intuit offers a Quicken Online Backup Service (\$8.95 to \$24.95 per month; [www.connected.com/quicken05/](http://www.connected.com/quicken05/)) that backs up Quicken (and other) files, you don't need to choose your backup service based on your financial software or other programs. DataDepositBox.com, for example, also backs up user-specified


files and lets the user retrieve the files via any computer that can connect to the Internet (1 cent per megabyte; [www.datadepositbox.com](http://www.datadepositbox.com)).

## When All Else Fails

Don't give up hope if your plans fall apart and your only remaining copy of an important file is on a burned or flooded computer. Data recovery experts use know-how and hi-tech tools to extract files from horribly mangled drives. Not all drives will relinquish data, of course, but if you're desperate to recover important financial info or an irreplaceable photo, it's worth a shot. You may not be able to deliver the drive in person, but the faster you can ship the drive to a recovery expert (especially if it has been damaged by water), the better.

If you're thinking about sending your drive to a recovery center, you'll need to determine if the data is worth the cost of the service. "The cost of data recovery on drives up to 60GB is about \$1,200," says Data Recovery Group's Michael Ahern ([www.datarecoverygroup.com](http://www.datarecoverygroup.com)). "Then drives from 60GB to 120GB is about \$1,500 and drives from 120GB to 200GB is about \$1,800." And that's for drives that weren't submerged. "If there is water damage to the drive, you can expect to pay about \$300 more" than the standard price, says Ahern. However, Data Recovery Group offers discounts to disaster victims.

## Back It Up

If you regularly back up your files to local hardware and remote servers, you can breathe a little easier when you hear about threatening weather or events. As for Gallicio, she is considering sending her drive to a data recovery service. And her data backup plans now include an external hard drive and automatic backup software. 

BY JOSHUA GULICK

## tips

Keep Your  
CE Gear Clean

1

**Think Green**

Keeping your electronic equipment clean can help extend the usability of those items in the short run, but keeping your electronics from heading to your local landfill can help everyone in the long run. The EPA's (Environmental Protection Agency's) Plug-In To eCycling Web page ([www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/conserve/plugin](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/conserve/plugin)) provides information about how to properly dispose of, donate, and recycle computers, monitors, TVs, and other electronic equipment. Click the Resources link for Questions To Ask A Recycler and Guidelines For Materials Management documents.

2

**Kitchen Care**

As your kitchen starts to see more and more electronics, such as under-the-counter radios and DVD/CD players, you'd do well to keep the lid on airborne grease. When cooking, make sure you use a vent hood. Weather permitting, you might want to open some windows to increase air circulation. Make sure to wash and dry your hands before reaching for the TV remote, radio controls, or microwave keypad. You'll also want to keep an eye on the hands of anyone else who is likely to touch your electronic stuff, especially the kids.

3

**Cord Organizers**

Even with all the cool wireless devices around lately, wires are a simple fact of life. But just because we're willing to live with wires, power cords, and data cables doesn't mean we have to trip over them wherever we go. Cableorganizer.com features cord channels and raceways for hiding the wiring to larger electronics, such as your computer and home-theater system. For smaller items, the Cable Turtle (\$5.99) comes in nine colors and attractively conceals excess cabling. Try the discrete earPod to untangle your earbud-style headphones.

4

**Keep It Clean**

When you read the product-care instructions for your electronics, you're sure to find lots of information about the device's proper operating temperatures. You don't have to read between the lines to figure out that in order to keep your stuff working well, you'll need to keep it in a clean environment. If you're planning a home-improvement project, make sure to remove sensitive electronics from the area or cover them with a sheet. It's also a good idea to ensure that the day-to-day operating environment isn't prone to excessive dust, dirt, and grime. Don't set sensitive devices where pets can get to them or within reach of small children. Vacuuming and changing furnace filters regularly can also help.

5

**Defeat Dust  
& Fingerprints**

In the war against dust, the battle is unending. If your electronic gear has a surface, you can bet dust will settle there. Moreover, monitors, TVs, computers, digital cameras, and the rest are virtual fingerprint magnets. Due to the sensitive nature of electronics, however, using a sopping-wet dishrag can have obviously disastrous results. Falcon Safety Products ([www.falconsafety.com](http://www.falconsafety.com)) offers several items in its Dust-Off line, including canned air dusters (starting at \$2.99), premoistened antistatic Monitor Wipes (\$8.99), and dry Multi-Purpose Wipes (\$7.99). In an age where almost everything has a display, you're going to need some specialized chamois to scrub away the dust and fingerprints without scratching the screens. Falcon has that base covered, as well, with its reusable microfiber Screen Shammy (\$5.99).



BY ANDREW LEIBMAN



Great theater deserves a great setting.



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Sanus reinvents style in your own home with new Java furniture. Exotic hardwood in a luscious espresso finish, with the added contemporary flair of extruded aluminum and fluted glass, creates the newest tide in contemporary décor. As with all Sanus furniture, the Java line is built with unique A/V features such as extra-deep shelving, large wire channels and removable back panels. Features that set Sanus furniture apart from the crowd...like an escape to a secluded tropical isle.

**SANUS** | **SYSTEMS**

THE UNION OF FORM AND FUNCTION

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## First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.

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# first glimpse

Special Product Section



**Fujitsu Plasmavision P50XTA51US**

MSRP: \$6,499

[www.plasmavision.com](http://www.plasmavision.com)

## A Picture Worth A Thousand Words

This integrated Plasmavision HDTV offers the complete solution to top-quality home theater.

The P50XTA51US offers rich, accurate, lifelike colors, high contrast in both light and dark rooms, plus stunning brightness from any viewing angle.

The P50XTA51US plasma TV also includes an exclusive high-definition Digital Cable Ready tuner, and the AVM-II (Advanced Video Movement-II) Digital Video Processor, offering you, the discriminating home theater enthusiast, the easiest and most efficient way to enjoy today's ultimate

quality video performance from all your audio and video sources.

It is easy to incorporate the P50XTA51US into any home theater setting due to its sleek silver bezel, the TV's light weight, and the extensive array of inputs and outputs that make integration a snap.

Superior picture quality and natural color display combine with high resolution to virtually transport you to far away places without ever leaving the comfort of your own home.

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



## Other features include:

- AVM-II Digital Video Processor
- 1.07 billion colors
- Ultra high-contrast ratio
- 160-degree viewing angle
- Slim and lightweight
- 3-year inclusive warranty
- AVM noise reduction
- Advanced color management

- Ambient light sensor
- Side mounting speakers
- Digital Cable Ready tuner
- CableCARD slot
- Eight picture memory modes
- 16:9 aspect ratio

**FUJITSU**



# first glimpse

Special Product Section

## Hitachi 42-inch UltraVision CineForm Plasma HDTV

MSRP: \$3,399.95

[www.hitachi.us](http://www.hitachi.us)



## Discover The Innovation

Experience the high performance and refined aesthetics of the UltraVision CineForm 42-inch Plasma HDTV. Distinct in design, it features innovative Hitachi technologies. The New VirtualHD 1080p II video processor analyzes and optimizes every video frame and combines with ALiS technology that produces over 1 million pixels for a brighter, smoother, and more film-like picture. The Illuminated Roll and Click Remote and Learning AV Net IV combine to provide easy channel navigation and the power to control your entire home theatre system. The HDT52 series delivers the ultimate in convenience with the TV Guide On Screen Interactive Program Guide providing superior program accessibility. The 42HDT52 is an intelligent blend of superior design and technology.

### Exclusive Features

**CineForm Industrial Design.** An elegantly sculptured black frame surrounds the high-definition picture.

**VirtualHD 1080p II.** When content from film is sent to your home, it requires processing that can cause picture noise or distortion. VirtualHD technology reduces this noise to a minimum, recreating the smooth curves and high fidelity image of the original film source. An advanced technique, dynamic histogram processing, digitally maps the incoming signal to optimize on-screen contrast, color, and sharpness.

**Quick Start Seamless HDTV Tuner.** Hitachi HDTV tuner technology brings viewers a unique blend of convenience and

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



performance. Conventional HDTV tuners need extended startup time to scan for channels and require switching between antenna inputs when selecting analog or digital programming. Hitachi HDTV tuner technology delivers the picture quickly with seamless access to all available channels.

**Learning AV NET.** The advanced Learning AV NET system simplifies operation of your complete home theater with a single convenient interface. Learning AV NET makes the new UltraVision television the command and control center of your entire home theater system.

**Illuminated Roll & Click Remote.** Easily browse channels or adjust volume using the unique rolling wheels or quickly create or change favorite channels at the push of a button.

**Day & Night Memory With Timer.** Separate Day and Night Memory settings deliver superior picture quality for any lighting condition. By simply pressing a button on the remote or using the automatic timer, you can toggle between bright daytime settings and high fidelity nighttime settings for each source.

## HITACHI

Inspire the Next



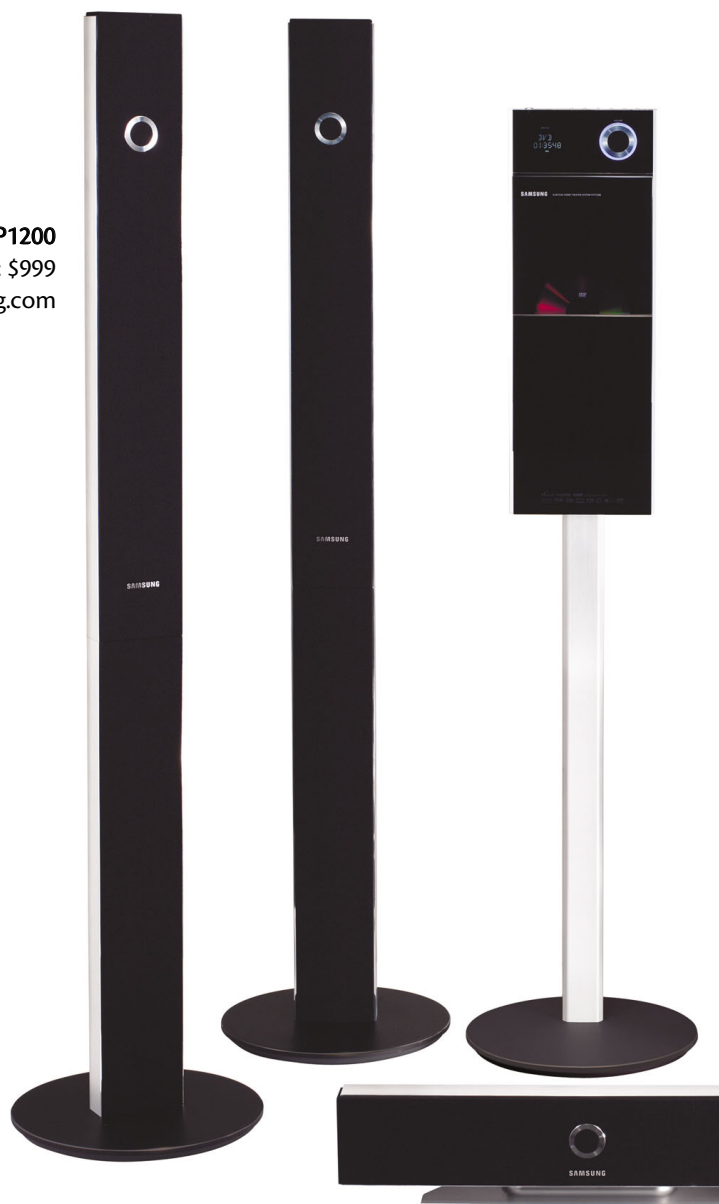
# first glimpse

Special Product Section

**Samsung HT-P1200**

MSRP: \$999

[www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)



## Premium Home Theater

Samsung once again provides the next step in home theater excellence with the HT-P1200. The premium home-theater-in-a-box system with powered subwoofer and SACD playback offers a high level of performance and aesthetics for home entertainment lovers.

Designed with both the audio and the aesthetic needs of home-theater connoisseurs in mind, the HT-P1200 features an

elegant black finish, black bezel, and Samsung's signature silver ring design that can also be found on select Samsung HDTVs.

Home-entertainment lovers will be amazed by the accurate sound reproduction provided by 800 Watts of pure audio power. It features Extended Surround Effect from five speakers to simulate a virtual 8.1-channel surround stage, and a separately powered subwoofer provides an earthshaking bass

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# first glimpse

Special Product Section



sound, adding a new audio dimension to the special effects from movie blockbusters.

The HT-P1200 supports DVD-Audio SACD, DivX, JPEG, MP3, and WMA-Disc playback. An HDMI Digital-to-Digital video output provides a top-quality signal transmission from the DVD player. The USB Host feature allows direct digital playback of MP3 or WMA files from a digital music player, as

well as JPEG playback from most digital cameras or MPEG-4 compressed digital video files through the USB input.





# first glimpse

Special Product Section



**Mustek DV 5300SE Digital Camcorder**

MSRP: \$129

[www.mustek.com](http://www.mustek.com)

## Movies, Memories & More

Mustek's DV 5300SE is a full-featured digital camcorder, high-resolution digital still camera, digital voice recorder, MP3 player, and SD/MMC card reader. It also has the capability to be used as a Web cam for Internet video chat.

The DV 5300SE has a newly designed control panel that merges user-friendliness with sophisticated manual options, such as digital effects, scene modes, and white balance, to assure stunning video, photography, and multimedia results.

Extending the typical capabilities of a digital camcorder to meet a wider range of needs, the DV 5300SE eliminates the expense of purchasing an array of separate devices for video, photos, voice, and music, as well as the hassle of learning curves and storage of each of these devices. The DV 5300SE covers all these needs, and it is so compact that it's convenient

to keep with you all the time, so you're always ready to capture great pictures, video and sounds.

### Making Movies, Making Memories

The DV 5300SE captures magic moments in full-action video excitement. Three video resolutions are available for you to choose from (640 x 480 [10fps], 352 x 288 [30fps] and 320 x 240 [30fps]) depending on their quality and storage requirements. The MPEG-4-compatible video is captured on the camera's internal 32MB of memory or on a SD/MMC memory card up to 1GB. The video with audio can be viewed on the camera's LCD or easily downloaded via the high-speed USB port to a Windows PC or other multimedia

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



devices such as the new Mustek PVR-H140 (\$399.99) portable media center.

## 5MP Photography

The DV 5300SE delivers the performance of a 5MP digital still camera at a fraction of the price and offers point-and-shoot simplicity with its built-in auto exposure, white balance, flash, and shutter.

## More Features = More Fun

Why stop at movies and photos? The DV 5300SE's built-in headphones and speaker lets you listen to MP3 or WMA music

files stored on memory cards, while its integrated microphone allows the camera to record important interviews, business meetings, school lectures, and narrations as WAV files to be played back on a PC, uploaded to a Web page, or attached to an email. In addition, you can plug the camera's USB port into your PC to get an instant video conferencing camera for on-line video chat when using software such as Microsoft Net Meeting.

Accessories include an installation CD, camera strap, bag, three AAA alkaline batteries, a USB cable, and an A/V cable.





# first glimpse

Special Product Section

PENTAX Optio A10  
MSRP: \$350  
[www.pentaximaging.com](http://www.pentaximaging.com)



## Innovation & Excellence

The PENTAX Optio A10 camera, which was unveiled in January at the 2006 Consumer Electronics Show, is the first PENTAX compact digital with an 8MP CCD (Charged Couple Device) packaged in the signature slim, lightweight, stylish design of the Optio digital camera line.

The A10 represents a complete upgrade and overhaul of PENTAX's digital camera series, and it will be the first model of the PENTAX high-end Optio series. The combination of 8MP, shake reduction, and a new SMC (Super Multicoated) PENTAX zoom lens makes the Optio A10 the flagship model for PENTAX.

The Optio A10 features a Shake Reduction system which is unique to PENTAX and delivers stability in shooting

conditions that are sensitive to camera shake, such as telephoto shots or indoor shots without a flash.

The Optio A10 also features:

**High image quality with a large CCD.** The Optio A10 is equipped with a new large CCD boasting 8.32 total megapixels. Featuring approximately 1.6% more light-receiving area than conventional PENTAX compact camera CCDs, this CCD offers advantages in superior tone reproduction, texture delineation, and noise reduction.

**High-performance SMC PENTAX zoom lens.** Constructed from seven elements in five groups, including three double-sided aspherical lenses, the newly developed SMC PENTAX zoom lens produces clear, high-contrast

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



images. The design corrects effectively for spherical and other aberrations, and original coating cuts out ghosting and flare.

**Elegant, stylish design.** The Optio A10 features refined highlights including a highly textured aluminum alloy exterior, a multifaceted accent lens ring, and a connector cover designed to blend in with the camera.

**Intuitive Mode palette.** The Mode palette lists various modes on the LCD (liquid-crystal display) to allow quick navigation and selection from the 15 shooting modes and 15 playback modes through the translucent display, which superimposes mode icons over the LCD monitor image, so changing settings while framing the subject is simple.

**Auto picture mode.** Auto mode makes taking photos easy and fun. Selecting the Auto mode from the shooting mode palette has the camera automatically select the mode from Portrait, Landscape, Night Scene, or Standard, according to the shooting conditions.

# PENTAX®



# music & movies

music

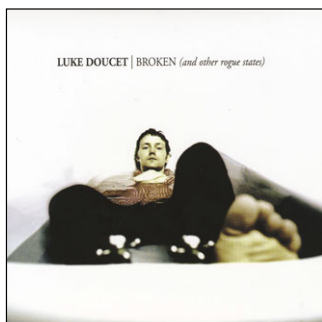
BY SAM EVANS

## Luke Doucet

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$12.80

**BROKEN (and other rogue states)**

[Six Shooter Records]



Though he spent years working with artists such as Sarah McLachlan and Veal, *Broken (and other rogue states)* shows that Luke Doucet has come into his own as both a solo musician and songwriter. The unique blend of musical styles makes it well worth the listen.

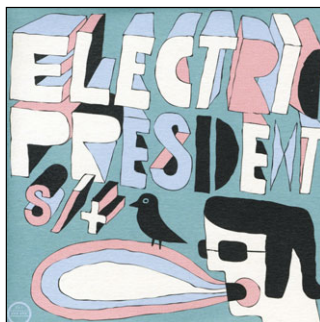
The album starts off with "Brother," a song with a traditional country feel and a screaming steel guitar. "Emily, Please" is a ditty with a Spanish influence that implements an interesting guitar melody supported by a bright mariachi horn section. Our favorite song of the album, "Lucky Strikes," is a quirky song that features a few sly changes in meter and easy-to-relate-to lyrics that lament the difficulty of getting out of a toxic relationship. Even if you aren't a fan of the traditional sob-story country theme of this album, Doucet's wry wit, both musically and lyrically, makes it easy to enjoy.

## Electric President

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$15.98

**S/T**

[Morr Music]



The spacey and open sound of *S/T* by Electric President is created by blending electronica with principles of minimalism. The instrumentation and melodic line are fairly simple but in a soothing rather than boring way. If you're looking for the perfect album to relax to, look no further than this one.

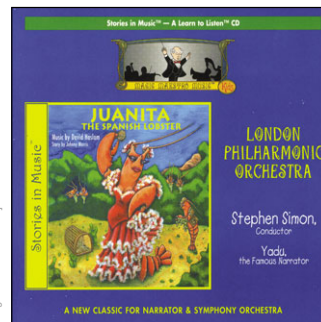
## Music by David Haslam

Story by Johnny Morris

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$16.98

**JUANITA THE SPANISH LOBSTER**

[Magic Maestro Music]



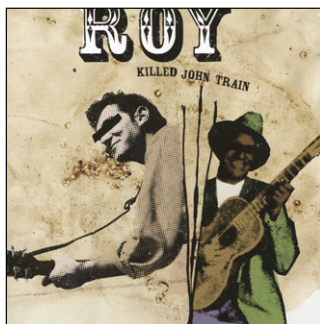
*Juanita The Spanish Lobster* is the latest in Magic Maestro's Stories In Music series. This is a great way to get your little ones interested in classical music. The story of Juanita, a lobster who longs to escape her mundane sea life for something a little more interesting, is accented marvelously by the London Philharmonic.

## Roy

• AVAILABLE: MARCH 14 • PRICE: \$12

**KILLED JOHN TRAIN**

[Lujo Records]



Though *Killed John Train* keeps the witty lyricism and folk formats that popularized Roy's previous album *Big City Sin And Small Town Redemption*, the band is experimenting with different chord progressions and drum beats to make the lyrics more prominent and the music easier to listen to than previous releases.

## Barry Manilow

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$19.99

**THE GREATEST SONGS OF THE FIFTIES**

[Arista Records]



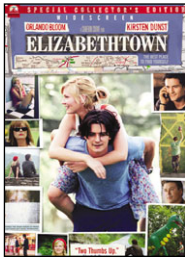
If you've ever sang "Copacabana" at karaoke, this album is for you. It isn't the most intellectually stimulating release of his career, but Manilow's rendition of tracks including "Unchained Melody," "Are You Lonesome Tonight," and "Beyond The Sea," show he can breathe new life into the classics.

movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

Elizabethtown

RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: FEBRUARY 7 • PRICE: \$29.99



This quirky romantic comedy showcases Orlando Bloom ("The Lord of the Rings Trilogy," "Pirates of the Caribbean") in a role that's a departure from the swashbuckling parts he's used to. "Elizabethtown" begins with Drew Baylor's life spiraling out of control. After a botched job costs the shoe company he works for hundreds of millions of dollars and results in his getting fired, Drew's girlfriend Ellen dumps him before the ink on his pink slip dries. Drew's on the verge of suicide when learns his father has died. On the flight home, he meets Claire Colburn (Kirsten Dunst of "Mona Lisa Smile" and "Crazy/ Beautiful"), and an unlikely relationship blossoms. Talented

Director Cameron Crowe ("Jerry Maguire," "Almost Famous") wrote and produced the film.

In Her SHOES

RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$29.99



Based on Jennifer Weiner's novel, "In Her Shoes" is a classic sibling-rivalry story. Susannah Grant (screenplays for "Ever After" and "Erin Brockovich") adapted the book's spirit to the silver screen. The film stars Cameron Diaz ("There's Something About Mary," "Charlie's Angels") as Maggie Feller, the attractive, irresponsible little sister with dyslexia. Toni Collette ("The Sixth Sense," "About A Boy") plays Maggie's head-on-straight but plain sister Rose—a successful attorney who lacks Maggie's zest. Curtis Hanson ("L.A. Confidential," "8-Mile") sits in the director's chair, making a marked departure from his more gritty work. Maggie and Rose have only their rough childhood in common, but Diaz and Collette give the sisters a palpable on-screen dynamic.

Tim Burton's Corpse Bride

RATING: PG • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$28.98



Leave it to Director Tim Burton ("The Nightmare Before Christmas," "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory") to concoct a frightfully twisted, animated love story. Burton again relies on Johnny Depp ("Chocolat," "Finding Neverland") to voice Victor Van Dort, a young man of Victorian upbringing set to marry his true love, Victoria (voiced by Emily Watson of "Angela's Ashes"). When Victor, desperately trying to re-

hearse his nuptial vows, practices by slipping his wife-to-be's ring on a twig, he suddenly realizes the twig is a decaying finger as he unwittingly unites himself with the Corpse Bride (voiced by Burton's female fave Helena Bonham Carter of "Big Fish"). The Corpse Bride whisks Victor away to the ironically lively underworld of the dead, which contrasts his stodgy Victorian life but ultimately teaches him where true love rests.

Recently Released

Flightplan

• RATING: PG-13 • PRICE: \$29.99

Although we preferred Wes Craven's aerial thriller "Red Eye," "Flightplan" has its moments if you're willing to suspend disbelief. Kyle (played by Jodie Foster) is a grieving widow whose daughter mysteriously disappears when the two are returning home on a transatlantic flight with her husband's body. Peter Sarsgaard ("Jarhead") and Sean Bean ("The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring") are sharp in their supporting roles.

Lord Of War

• RATING: R • PRICE: \$30.98

After starring in such Jerry Bruckheimer-produced flicks as "Con Air" and "The Rock," it's easy to see Nicholas Cage's ("Adaptation," "National Treasure") top billing as arms dealer Yuri Orlov in "Lord Of War" and assume it will be nonstop action. Quite the contrary, the Andrew Niccol ("Gattaca") film provides a hearty amount of drama and dark comedy to tell a compelling story about a side of war we rarely see.

Grey's Anatomy: Season One

RATING: NOT RATED • AVAILABLE: FEBRUARY 14 • PRICE: \$29.99



It's no surprise to see a Valentine's Day release for the first season of one of our favorite TV shows. A medical dramedy that sets the affairs of the heart against a canvas of the physiology of the heart (among other organs), "Grey's Anatomy" follows Dr. Meredith Grey (Ellen Pompeo), the title character and first-year surgical intern at Seattle Grace Hospital, as she struggles along with her fellow interns to tackle

tough surgeries alongside romantic maladies. Although the shows start and end with Grey's voice-over narration, it's the neurotic hijinx of her intern cohorts that keeps us coming back for more. You may recognize Sandra Oh (Dr. Christina Yang) and Katherine Heigl (Dr. Isobel "Izzie" Stevens) from their prior roles in "Sideways" and "Roswell," respectively. Superbly acted, "Grey's" is a vertical incision above the rest.



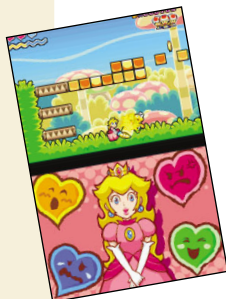
# games

for you and the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

## Super Princess Peach

• PRICE: \$34.99



RATING



Nintendo DS

It's about time a little regal girl power made its way to the Nintendo DS. For years, Princess Peach has been relegated to the role of damsel in distress, waiting idly for Mario to rescue her. This time, Mario is the hapless captive, and it's Peach's turn to return the favor. Super Princess Peach puts a few new twists on the classic 2D side-scrolling gameplay that made the Super Mario Brothers series one of the defining families of video games.

• NINTENDO • WWW.NINTENDO.COM

## Kingdom Hearts II

• PRICE: \$49.99



RATING



PlayStation 2

The first installment of Kingdom Hearts won over RPG (role playing game) enthusiasts by combining the traditional mystique of Square Enix RPGs with Disney's familiar and loveable cast of characters. The story follows Sora, Goofy, and Donald as they continue their quest through Kingdom Hearts' fantasy realm. In addition to stunning graphics (you'll swear you're actually interacting with a Disney movie), Kingdom Hearts II features cameos from characters of Square Enix's popular Final Fantasy series.

• SQUARE ENIX • WWW.SQUARE-ENIX.COM

## Gears of War

• PRICE: \$59.99



RATING



Xbox 360

If Gears of War is any indication of what Microsoft's Xbox 360 is capable of, we like what we see. The game uses the Unreal Engine 3, which is a fancy way of saying these are some of the most breathtaking, realistic graphics we've ever seen. Gears of War is a third-person tactical shooter with enough shoot-em-up action to tide Halo fans over until Halo 3's inevitable debut. You'll assume the role of Marcus Fenix as he leads his team against the ghastly Locust Horde.

• MICROSOFT • WWW.GEARSOFWAR.COM

## OtterBox For iPod nano

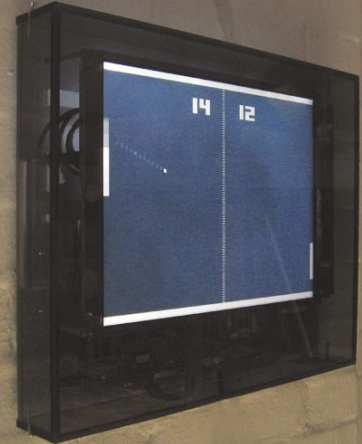
• [WWW.OTTERBOX.COM](http://WWW.OTTERBOX.COM) • PRICE: \$39.95

It's the accessory every iPod should come with, to at least partially justify those high prices. The \$39.95 OtterBox for the iPod nano is a waterproof (down to 3 feet, anyway) enclosure that still lets you use all the controls, including the Click Wheel. It also protects your nano from drops, sand, spills, and other hazards. Add your own waterproof earphones, and perhaps Otter's \$14.95 armband, and you can jog in the rain or listen in the tub. There are models for other iPods, including the new video units, at [www.otterbox.com](http://www.otterbox.com).



## Pong Clock

• [WWW.BVKS.NL](http://WWW.BVKS.NL) • PRICE: \$100 TO \$200



The mid-1970s, your neighbor's basement, and glowing white blocks on a TV screen. For many of us awestruck brats, Pong was our first introduction to video games—not to mention the coolest toy a kid could have. Dutch design studio Buro Vormkrijgers is about to bring this retro gem back into your home, reinvented as a clock. The two paddles automatically play table tennis on-screen, and the "score" tells you the time. Unfortunately, you can't actually *play* Pong on the Pong Clock, so let's start a petition for that, shall we? The Clock is available for worldwide shipping from [www.bvks.nl](http://www.bvks.nl), at an estimated price of between \$100 and \$200.

## Duluth Trading Mobile Office Backpack

• [WWW.DULUTHTRADING.COM](http://WWW.DULUTHTRADING.COM) • PRICE: \$59.99



Even a notebook bag can be ready for the backcountry. If the hiker in your life starts to feel withdrawal when away from his laptop, give him this beauty from Duluth Trading ([www.duluthtrading.com](http://www.duluthtrading.com)). Stiff sidewalls, moderate padding, and fleece lining surround a roomy, segmented cargo hold. Pockets are everywhere, including a removable cell phone sheath. A nonslip shoulder harness with chest straps and generous, breathable back padding will remind him that this \$59.99 backpack is the real deal.

... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS



# what they're SAYIN

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

It's one thing to buy various CE devices, but it's another entirely to maintain them. The tally increases when you're paying for software upgrades, hardware accoutrements, subscription services, and the latest, greatest gadgets. When estimating the cost of your computer, digital music player, or cell phone, for instance, don't forget to add in the associated costs: a broadband or dial-up Internet connection; music downloads from iTunes, Napster, and Rhapsody, to name a few; and the monthly service charges.

## Jennie Schlueter

MOM

Jennie Schlueter of St. Charles, Mo., 29-year-old mother of spirited 2-year-old Micah relies on electronic gadgets, such as her PC, for her freelance writing and editing. Jennie says this is kind of a tough question because although she and her husband, Todd, have big-ticket items on their wish lists, they usually buy what they need when they need it. Several weeks ago, she needed a recorder for phone interviews; she bundled Micah and the other little boy she watches in the car and off to RadioShack they went.

The Schlueters plan to get satellite radio for the car, and they'd like a receiver for the house, too. A Sirius subscription is \$12.95 per month. Portable receivers cost about \$330, and home receivers range from \$250 to \$2,000. Jennie and Todd have cell phones for which they pay \$60 per month, and cable runs \$150 a month. (It includes cable, landline, and Internet services.)

Jennie downloads music from Napster Light, at 99 cents per song, and she pays \$15 per month to Earthlink to maintain her email address, even though the local cable company is her ISP.

Next year, they may buy the surround-sound 5.1 speakers, receiver, and progressive-scan DVD player that Todd wants, but not this year with a new baby boy on the way.



## Karen Thomas

BUSINESS OWNER

Thomas PR agency president Karen Thomas has a most-impressive wish list for CE gadgets in 2006. This over-30 Long Island native worked bi-coastally, commuting between her Melville, N.Y., and San Francisco, Calif., offices and lived in England as a child. Karen attended college in New York City, and she still has an apartment there, too.

We asked what she's planning to spend in 2006 for her own personal use. Karen says, "The most important items on my list are a TiVo and a new MP3 player." Karen plans to buy a new microwave, DVD player, big-screen TV, laptop, printer and photo printer, and cell phone this year. Her list includes cable TV and wireless routers, and she's going to need music downloads for that new MP3 player. When she buys a new digital camera, she'd also like to get camera accessories and storage drives for the photographs. All told, Karen estimates she'll spend roughly \$13,000 on CE devices and subscription services in 2006.





## How Much Do You Spend On CE Devices A Year?

Melissa Ebert

COLLEGE-AGED YOUNG WOMAN

Melissa Ebert, a 21-year-old junior majoring in fashion merchandising at Philadelphia University, will probably spend less than she'd like this year because of school costs. Funds permitting, she says, "I'd like a new flat iron to straighten my hair. The one I want is about \$160. Also, I really want a car adapter for my iPod mini."

Melissa is hoping to spend \$80 for the adapter, so she reads the Best Buy ads in the Sunday paper and waits for a sale. She's also hoping for a sale on the Altec Lansing inMotion iM3 (\$179.99), so she can listen to her mini without headphones.

And, although she buys music from iTunes, Melissa is set for a few months because she got generous iTunes gift certificates for Christmas last year. She'll use them,

but she also knows she'll probably buy a few CDs this year, so she can rip those songs onto her mini, too. She'll likely buy a few DVDs, as well.

Melissa is not in the market for a laptop or a printer, though. She has an HP laptop she got for high-school graduation, and it's working well. She has an Olympus digital camera, but she's planning to buy another xD memory card, probably the 256MB card, which usually runs about \$35.

Depending on how the coverage and service are in Philadelphia, Melissa may get a new cell phone, too. She says she's pretty happy with her Samsung phone and Verizon service, and both worked for her in New Jersey, but she's not sure yet about coverage in Philadelphia.

Elaine Davis

EMPTY NESTER

Elaine Davis, 52, and husband Brye, also 52, are empty nesters, but they still supply their two grown children with electronic gadgets. Daughter Katie and her husband Marty are building a new house, and son Bobby is a senior at MIT. Elaine laughs, saying, "I'm fairly low-tech, but Brye and the kids feed off each other and get the latest gadget the minute it's available."

Elaine contents herself with their castoffs, which aren't too shabby because none of them are very old. Her husband is the purchaser of all things electronic, and he justifies everything he buys by giving the old one to the kids. And the kids encourage the practice by talking up every new device on the market.

She can't estimate their yearly CE device bill because it's huge.

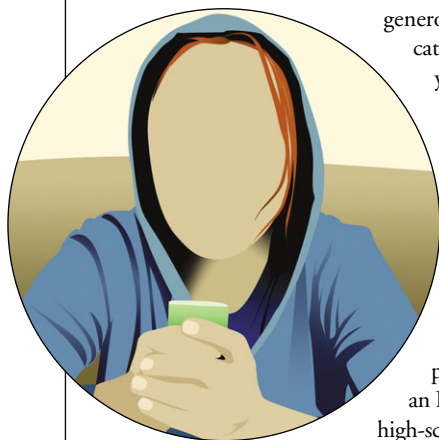
Elaine says, "Brye and Bobby are both MIT geeks, and it's utterly remarkable the amount of stuff they think they need."

They'll definitely buy one laptop this year, and they always exchange gadgets for Christmas; the kids are grown and don't want or need clothes. One year it was digital cameras and photo printers. This past year, it was iPods and iPod accessories.

Bobby even engraved his proposal on the iPod nano he gave his girlfriend (now fiancée—she accepted). Elaine gave Brye a DLO TransPod, so he can listen to his iPod in the car. She's not sure what they'll exchange this year, but it'll be gadgety.

Brye bought a first generation 42-inch rear-projection Mitsubishi HDTV before HD broadcasts were available in their area. He called Comcast, the cable provider, daily for weeks lobbying for them to broadcast in HD until they finally did. She says for dual-tuner DVR service, basic and extended basic HD cable, and broadband for their Internet connection, they pay \$106.51 per month.

They all have cell phones, too, and Elaine, Brye, and Bobby all have Verizon, which includes unlimited minutes to talk to each other. Elaine says they can't share minutes because Brye's company pays for his phone, and Bobby has to have a 617 area code, so his friends on campus don't have to pay for long-distance calls to talk to him. Because you can't have two area codes on a family plan, they pay about \$85 per month for the phones. She adds, "We initially bought camera phones but quickly discovered that aside from having people's pictures associated with various rings and numbers, we never used the cameras."





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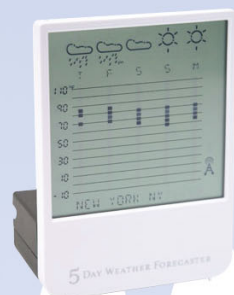
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